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TRIAL BY COMBAT FOR THE ENGLISH THRONE:
ASSESSING KING HAROLD GODWINESON DURING THE
NORWEGIAN AND NORMAN INVASIONS OF 1066

by

Robert E. Duman

A THESIS

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Trial by Combat for the English Throne: Assessing King Harold Godwineson during the
Norwegian and Norman Invasions of 1066

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Abstract: In 1066, Duke William of Normandy defeated England's King Harold Godwineson at the Battle of Hastings, and Harold received an unjustified label as a poor military commander. However, analyzing the military background of Harold and his opponents in 1066, William and King Haraldr Harðraði of Norway, demonstrates that he was a capable military leader. The English, Norwegians, and the Normans had similar army recruitment policies and weapons, but had some differences that affected their strategies and tactics. The Norwegians relied on raids, using their ships for strategic mobility, and the Normans had a strongpoint strategy implementing castles and cavalry. Harold Godwineson, Haraldr Harðraði, and William used their military systems to establish themselves in their territories and achieve their political agendas. Harold Godwineson's ability to protect England while an earl led King Edward and the English magnates to select him as the next king. Harald Harðraði served as a mercenary in Kiev and Constantinople before returning to rule Norway. William continually fought other French magnates to keep his position as Duke of Normandy. In 1066, Harold Godwineson marched his army from London to York in a few days to surprise and decisively defeat Haraldr Harðraði at Stamford Bridge. He led another march to southern England, meeting the Normans near Hastings. Harold utilized the terrain to his infantry's advantage, while William tried to penetrate the formation with archers and cavalry. Not until after Harold was killed after hours of fighting did the English morale collapse, resulting in William's victory.

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The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Air Force, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, HISTORIOGRAPHY, AND MILITARY SYSTEMS

Introduction

King Edward the Confessor died in 1066 with no heirs, leaving several claimants for the English throne (see Figure 1). The ætheling (meaning direct descendent of King Cerdic, first Saxon ruler of Wessex) usually succeeded the crown, but the only remaining one was a boy. Edgar the Ætheling was the grandson of King Edward's older half-brother Edmund Ironside. Earl Harold Godwineson of Wessex did not have royal blood, but he led the most powerful landowning family (besides the King and Queen) in England. He also had the support of his brothers and fellow earls Gryð and Leofwine.¹

Foreigners also vied to take the English throne. Denmark's King Sveinn Estriðson had the strongest foreign "claim" to the English throne since his maternal grandfather was King Sveinn Haraldsson (father of Knútr the Great), but he chose not to make a claim for the crown, although depending on the sources consulted, aided both King Harold and Duke William. Duke William developed close ties with Edward during his exile in Normandy, and had a tenuous succession claim since his Grand-Aunt Emma was King Edward's mother. King Haraldr Harðráði of Norway did not have a succession claim for England besides a supposed pact between King Magnús (Haraldr's former co-ruler of Norway) and Harðaknútr (King of England before Edward), stating if one died without an

¹For Scandinavian names, I have followed Kelly DeVries example and used the Scandinavian spelling instead of the anglicized version. The symbol "ð" is pronounced "th" and the "r" at the end of a name is

heir, the other would succeed. Since they both died childless, Haraldr saw himself the as next in line. Additionally he wanted to join the kingdoms of Norway and England as King Knútr the Great had done (Knútr also ruled Denmark, but Haraldr did not succeed in conquering it). He would ally later with Harold Godwineson's exiled brother Tostig, the former Earl of Northumbria, and King Malcom III of Scotland.

On his deathbed, King Edward chose Harold as the new king, and the *Witenagemot* (a council of English magnates) formally elected him as their choice, beginning a year-long struggle between three warlords, Harold, Haraldr, and William, to fight for the crown. In September 1066, Haraldr and Tostig defeated the Earls Edwin and Morcar at Fulford Gate, but lost to Harold five days later. Three weeks later, Duke William defeated King Harold at the Battle of Hastings. The remaining English magnates elected Edgar as the next king, but capitulated to William within a few months. By the end of 1066, William the Conqueror ruled England.

Harold Godwineson, king of England from 6 January to 20 October 1066, is more remembered for helping Duke William of Normandy to earn the epithet “the Conqueror” than his achievements. Despite his loss at the Battle of Hastings, was Harold a good military leader? Comparing the military institutions of England, Norway, and Normandy will present the options available to each warlord when diplomacy failed. The biographies of King Harold Godwineson, King Haraldr Harðráði, and Duke William will give the details of their political and military experience, demonstrating their capacity to develop their power base and confront challenges to it. Reviewing the strategic,

operational, and tactical events that led to Battles of Fulford Gate, Stamford Bridge, and Hastings will reveal the strengths and weaknesses of each warlord who placed the outcome of his dynastic struggle on a single trial by combat. The evidence suggests that Harold expertly used political skill and military prowess to earn England's kingship, defeat the Norwegians at Stamford Bridge, and nearly overcome the Normans at Hastings.

Recent historians have ignored the Norwegian Kings' Sagas value concerning the Battle of Stamford Bridge. The largest problem the scholars cannot resolve concerns the references to the English army using cavalry charges against the Norwegians. However, all medieval sources potentially contain erroneous information, and carefully using the source may divulge details that will not be available in other primary sources. This thesis will demonstrate that due to the conditions at the start of Stamford Bridge, the English most likely remained mounted on horses and pursued the isolated Norwegians in Harold's last great victory before the Battle of Hastings.

Historiography

The major sources for primary works concerning the events of 1066 come from the political states involved: England, Norway, and Normandy. German ecclesiastical and secular chronicles add information about Norway, and later Anglo-Norman sources demonstrate a more balanced view (although still influenced by the author's patron or personal agenda).

The English chronicles include *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the *Vita Ædwardi Regis*, and give the Anglo-Saxon perspective for the events leading up to the battles in 1066. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is actually a set of vernacular annuals written at

different monastic centers. The versions classified as C (Abingdon), D (Worcester, Evesham, or York), and E (Petersborough) are extensive and generally reliable, although modern historian Sten Körner believes for this time period they may have used the same source for their information. The C Version also ends in 1066 without mentioning William the Conqueror's invasion or the Battle of Hastings, and most likely the page was lost. The *Vita Ædwardi regis* was discovered in the nineteenth century, and gives good information on King Edward the Confessor's court, especially on Harold, Tostig, and Eadgyða (Harold and Tostig's sister who most likely commissioned the book).²

The Norwegian sources are not generally used for two major reasons: the sagas were written 150 years or more after the event took place and most of them have not been translated from Old Norse to English. The sources written closer to the time of events are non-Scandinavian. Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, which gives favorable details on King Haraldr not mentioned in the later sagas, was written in Hamburg. Saxo Grammaticus wrote *Gesta Danorum*, which praises ecclesiastical powers at the expense of secular powers like the *Gesta Hammaburgensis* did. He also writes more favorably of King Sveinn than King Haraldr, demonstrating his Danish origins.

Two other near-contemporary sources give valuable information from the Norwegian perspective. Theodoricus wrote the *Monumenta historica Norvegiae* in England at the request of Norway's King Sverri around 1180, which includes a brief account of the Norwegian invasion. The anonymous *Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sögum*, was written in

²Sten Körner, *The Battle of Hastings, England, and Europe, 1035-1066*, *Bibliotheca Historica Lundenis*, no. 14 (Lund: Gleerups, 1964), 1, 24; DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 4-5.

Norway and in vernacular instead of Latin. It also does not cover the invasion in detail, but it is more favorable to King Haraldr's character than Theodoricus' work.

Three sagas written from around 1220 to 1230 provide the greatest description of King Haraldr and his invasion into England. *Morkinskinna* ("rotten skin," which probably refers to the material it was written on) and *Fagrskinna* ("fair skin") have unknown authors and share many common details. The *Morkinskinna* is also the earliest of the Norwegian king chronicles, written in Iceland between 1220 and 1235. , Snorri Sturlson tried to filter his sources to establish the most likely course of events in *Heimskringla* ("orb of the world"), although he also wrote poetry and about Scandinavian myths. Another Norwegian kings' saga, *Flateyjarbók*, is a 15th century compilation of *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna*, *Heimskringla* and other works now lost, and has details not included in the other texts.³

The sources written before 1100 and from the Norman point of view include William of Jumieges' *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, William of Poitiers' *Gesta Guillelmi* and the Bayeux Tapestry. The Norman monk William of Jumièges wrote his account of the Norman dukes in 1070, later expanded by Orderic Vitalis and Robert Torigni. He had no military background, but his work still contains much valuable information on 1066 and the events leading up to it. The *Gesta Guillelmi* translator Marjorie Chibnall believes that William of Poitiers wrote the account of the battle between 1071 and 1077, which is very detailed but contains a strong Norman bias. He demonstrates an understanding of military affairs based upon his soldiering experience as a knight, and he served as a

³Devries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 9-13; *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings (1037-1157)*, trans. Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, Fiske Icelandic Collection, ed. Kristín Bragadóttir, Vol LI (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 66-72.

military chaplain and priest for William I. Although he did not participate in the 1066 campaign, he had access to many of those who did, including Duke William and Bishop Odo (which may explain the many similarities between the *Gesta Guillelmi* and the Bayeux Tapestry). The 70 meter-long Bayeux Tapestry's greatest value is visualizing arms, armor, ships, and actions that contemporary authors did not feel the need to write about (at least two meters of it may be lost). The borders give additional insight into the story's meaning, either through the fables represented by the images or the graphic depictions of beheading near the end of the tapestry. Bishop Odo's prominence in the tapestry despite his relatively minor role makes him the most likely patron. Historian N.P. Brooks and H.E. Walker convincingly argue that because of the illustration techniques and the anglicizing of the names on the tapestry, it must have been made in England. Since the tapestry contains scenes found in Norman sources and in English chronicles (such as King Edward's death scene from the *Vita Ædwardi*), it was intended for a joint Norman and Anglo-Saxon audience.⁴

Six Anglo-Norman authors wrote on the events early in the twelfth century including John of Worcester, Symeon of Durham, Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury, Orderic Vitalis, and Geoffrey Gaimar, who derived their information from earlier works and the memories of their elders. John of Worcester wrote the *Chronicon ex Chronicis*

⁴ Stephen Morillo, ed., *The Battle of Hastings: Sources and Interpretations*, Warfare in History Series, ed. Matthew Bennett, no. 1 (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1998), 17; William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi: The Deeds of Duke William*, trans. R.H.C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall, Oxford Medieval Texts, eds. D.E. Greenway, B.F. Harvey, and M. Lapidge (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1998), xxvii, xx-xxvi, xxx-xxxi; H.E.J. Cowdrey, "Towards an Interpretation of the Bayeux Tapestry," in *Anglo-Norman Studies X: The Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1987*, ed. R. Allen Brown (Wolfeboro, New Hampshire: The Boydell Press, 1988), 52, 63-4; N.P. Brooks and H.E. Walker, "The Authority and Interpretation of the Bayeux Tapestry," in *The Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1978*, ed. R. Allen Brown (Tovata: NJ, Rowan and Littleton, 1979), 9-13.

in the 1120s and 1140s, although the extent of the monk Florence's contribution is unknown. Modern historian Kelly DeVries believes John used care and accuracy when he compiled the *Chronicon* from earlier sources, possibly including a lost version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and provided a near contemporary and more balanced Anglo-Norman point of view. A monk named Symeon of Durham received a version of the *Chronicon* that John wrote up until 1118, and used it to write his *Historia Regum*. Symeon added detail on northern English issues, and he is the only primary source that named "Fulford Gate" as the battle between the northern earls and the Norwegian invaders. Henry of Huntingdon wrote *Historia Anglorum* between 1133 and 1154, and presents a favorable view towards the English. William of Malmesbury studied classical and contemporary histories as the foundation for writing *Gesta regum Anglorum* and several other books. He was born in 1095, son of a Norman father and an English mother. Orderic Vitalis, another product of a Norman father and English mother, wrote *Ecclesiastical History*, which focuses on Normandy and William the Conqueror. Finally, Geoffrey Gaimar, whose background is unknown, wrote *Lestoire des Engles*, a poem that generally favors the English (except the Godwine family) over the Normans.⁵

Scholars debate the historical authenticity of two other Battle of Hastings sources: the poems *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, and Wace's *Roman de Rou*. *Carmen* is either a work of Guy, Bishop of Amiens, who wrote it before May 1068 or as some scholars argue, an unknown author's fabrication at an undetermined date. If the former is true, the source is a contemporary account of the Battle of Hastings that is continental, but not

⁵DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 7-9; P. McGurk and R.R. Darlington, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, trans. J. Bray and P. McGurk, 2 vols (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), xvii-xx; Morillo, ed., *The Battle of Hastings*, 29, 33.

Norman. The *Roman de Rou* supposedly originated from an oral tradition of those who fought in the Battle of Hastings, and gives several details that are not recorded in other sources.⁶ Modern historian Matthew Bennett argues Wace had a knowledge of many military matters, such as strategy, logistics, warfare language, and tactics, despite his tendency to propagandize and popularize (which leads most scholars to dismiss this work as unreliable). He wrote during approximately 1150 to 1175 and synthesized Anglo-Norman sources. Bennett also argues that Wace's exaggerations in *Rou* should be used like the Aesop animal fable images in the Bayeux Tapestry border; they give meaning to what is going on with the rest of the story.⁷ They are also similar to the pre-battle speeches presented in many medieval works, which are not the actual words used by the kings, but give the author an opportunity to explain why the kings are fighting a battle. Other chroniclers, such as William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis, derived their information mainly from the sources already listed.⁸

Historians of the nineteenth century, such as pro-Saxon E.A. Freeman, pro-Norman J.H. Round, and military historians Sir Charles Oman and Hans Delbruck, began the modern attempt to interpret the primary sources and reconstruct the Battle of Hastings.⁹ Although some of their interpretations may seem outdated, their basic research still helps

⁶Morillo, ed., *The Battle of Hastings*, xii, 45.

⁷Matthew Bennett, "Wace and Warfare," in *Anglo-Norman Warfare: Studies in Late Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman Military Organization and Warfare*, ed. Matthew Strickland, 1993 Reprint (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1992), 230-1.

⁸Morillo, *The Battle of Hastings*, xii.

⁹*Ibid.*, xxxi.

in understanding the Battle of Hastings, and historians of the twentieth and twenty-first century use their arguments and critiques as a springboard for their own.

Background

A quick overview of England, Norway, and Normandy in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries will give the environment that Kings Harold and Haraldr and Duke William grew up in. Despite the politically unified, centralized monarchy, England was divided culturally between the Anglo-Saxon South and Southwest (excluding Wales) and Northumbria, while the Danelaw (where the Vikings settled in England and governed through Scandinavian customs rather than Anglo-Saxon ones) went from the Southeast to the Northwest (see Figure 2). Increasing commerce and the rise of towns led to economic growth, and villages and manors remained the main agrarian units. King Knútr, also ruler of Denmark and Norway, divided England into four parts and appointed an earl to control each one: Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, and Wessex (see Figure 2). After the death of Knútr and the brief reigns of his two sons, the kingship reverted back from the Danes to Edward, the ætheling raised in Normandy.¹⁰

Norway reached a transition point with Haraldr's accession to the throne. Political instability, caused primarily by chieftains who looked for civil war at home and expeditions abroad to make a living, came to an end. From Harald Fairhair to Magnus Olaffson, many kings did not die peacefully in bed, nor were they succeeded by their sons, and instead an invasion would determine the next king. One of Haraldr Harðraði's achievements was to decrease the power and influence of his rivals, primarily by making

¹⁰C. Warren Hollister, *The Making of England, 55 B.C. to 1399*, A History of England Series, ed. Lacey Baldwin Smith, no. 1, seventh ed. (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1996), 64, 70, 87, 94.

sure he had the sole army. Meanwhile, the transition to Christianity (bringing in the organization and administration ability of the church) and the tendency of the magnates to settle on land instead of taking off on military expeditions (relying on the king to implement justice and law) produced an era when the Norwegians looked for prosperity at home rather than abroad. The only exceptions were merchants who still traveled the trade routes in the Baltic Sea or along England and France.¹¹

The Normans descended from Vikings who settled in France, but adopted the Frankish organizations, customs, habits, religion, and laws. Many social and economic factors reached their apogee in the mid-eleventh century and combined to provoke the Normans to expand into England: economic prosperity, ecclesiastical revival, the establishment of a new aristocracy, the growth of ducal power, and pre-eminence in warfare. Ironically, the Viking raids in the ninth and tenth centuries led to the centralized monarchy's collapse in France and resulted in a feudal society, but they prompted the joining of fragmented provinces into one unified monarchy in England.¹²

Military Systems

Military systems include the following: the institutions that the English, Norwegians, and Normans used to muster men for war, the weapons the armies fought with, and the strategy and tactics these countries typically used in campaigns. England, Norway, and Normandy had many similarities in waging war, especially weapons. The main differences between them is that the English and Norwegians had an infantry-based army

¹¹Gwyn Jones, *A History of the Vikings*, Revised Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 387-391.

¹²R. Allen Brown, *The Normans and the Norman Conquest*, Second Edition (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 1985), 19, 29, 31-2, 51-2.

and relied on their fleet for either transport or port protection, while the Normans used castles to fortify areas and warhorses for raids and battles. Understanding the military systems explains the tools of violence available to Harold, Haraldr, and William to gain power and fight the battles of 1066.

Military Institutions

The military institutions of England, Norway, and Normandy include the methods that a king or duke could implement to raise forces for military endeavors. Important factors in raising troops were the nature of the conflict and the types of soldiers available.

The English system to raise troops was called a *fyrð*, and according to English historian C.W. Hollister, there were three types: select, great, and ship. The “select *fyrð*” contained the king’s professional soldiers and were adequate for most military actions. In times of crisis, such as when King Harold thought Duke William would invade in the summer of 1066, he would expand the select *fyrð* with part-time soldiers, which would be the “great *fyrð*.” Finally, the “ship *fyrð*” involved using men to perform service at sea. The king had four ways to raise money for war: land tax, special taxes to pay for mercenary wages, fine for non-performance of *fyrð* obligation, and commutation payments that certain towns could pay in lieu of military service.

The king would call up the select *fyrð* whenever he personally led or directed a campaign. This *fyrð*’s service requirement in the Anglo-Saxon army was one warrior, usually a *thegn* for each five hides (according to historian Dave Howarth, a hide is the amount of land that can support a family, in some places 40 acres and in other areas, 120

acres, depending on the land's economic assessment)¹³, but possibly someone of lower social status such as a peasant. The units were organized into three levels: in counties led by their sheriff, in shires led by their earl, or by kingdom and led by the king. Each warrior received four shillings per hide for maintenance and wages for two months. The Danelaw used the *carucate* system instead of the hide system, but the assessment method remained the same, possibly six *carucates* providing one warrior. In the select *fyrð*, the king would also have a personal retinue of professional soldiers known as housecarls. Historian Richard Abels explains that each important lord, including earls and bishops, used them for protection and escorts during peace or war and King Harðaknútr used them to collect taxes. Although they received pay, their obligation was based upon personal lordship.

The "great *fyrð*" generated the majority of men for defense or invasion. The men served in the immediate area, returned by nightfall, and paid for their own expense. An earl or a sheriff usually led these troops. On the border marches against Scotland and Wales, men most likely did not return by nightfall and served as the vanguard until the main army moved into a territory and as the rearguard when the army withdrew.¹⁴

Modern historian Richard Abels disagrees that a difference existed between a great and select *fyrð*, and insists that an Englishman would have two types of military

¹³C. Warren Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions on the Eve of the Norman Conquest*, Sandpiper Books Edition, 1998 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 40-1; David Howarth, *1066: The Year of the Conquest* (New York: Barnes and Noble Press in arrangement with Viking-Penguin, US, 1993), 19.

¹⁴Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions*, 18-19, 25-26, 28, 31-2, 53, 73, 81, 84, 85, 91-2, 95. Note: C. Warren Hollister uses the term mercenaries to define the core or elite professional soldiers who received wages to go on an expedition, and includes foreigners hired to participate in war, see 18-9, 25; Richard Abels, "Bookland and Fyrð Service in Late Saxon England," in *The Battle of Hastings: Sources and Interpretations*, ed. Stephen Morillo, Warfare in History Series, ed. Matthew Bennett, no. 1 (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1998), 73, 74, 76-7.

obligations: tenure and lordship. The lordship obligation meant that the king could make a personal call for soldiers to fight in a campaign. The other type of obligation, land tenure, reflects the relationship between the landowner and king, in which the king gave the individual a certain amount of land in return for military service, usually reflected in charters and loans.¹⁵ Modern historian Nicholas Hooper also disagrees with Hollister and does not think that the sources support the “unwieldy” great *fyrð*’s regular use in the last two centuries before the conquest since the king would call upon the “select” *fyrð* for war. However, two actions of Earls Edwin and Morcar in 1066 demonstrate the great *fyrð* in action. The first would be Edwin and Morcar’s repulse of Tostig during his summer raid and then their later attack of Haraldr and Tostig during their winter invasion.

The ship *fyrð* provided men for naval duty, and some coastal cities had special obligations to provide warships and appropriate manning. Every 300 hides had to provide one warship and its 60 oarmen, but interior districts were more likely to give money to the king who used it to build and maintain the ship. Other methods used to expand the fleet included hiring mercenary ships and impressing private merchant ships. The men raised by the *fyrð* either went to the land or sea depending on the type of campaign the king or earl used them for. Military historian John Gillingham adds that the English fleet provided the same martial roles that castles had on the European continent, which according to military historian John France includes providing a secure base and a garrison to threaten the immediate region.¹⁶

¹⁵Nicholas Hooper, “Anglo-Saxon Warfare on the Eve of the Conquest: A Brief Survey,” *The Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1978*, ed. R. Allen Brown (Tovata, NJ: Rowan and Littleton, 1979), 88.

¹⁶Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions*, 104, 107-8, 114-5, 122-3; John Gillingham, “An Age of Expansion, c. 1020-1204” in *Medieval Warfare, A History*, ed. Maurice Keen (New York: Oxford

Similar to the *fyrð*, the basis of the Norwegian military institution was the levy, or in Old Norse *leiðangr*. However, historians have argued whether this term reflects a standard and organized method of raising warriors or to describe any troops a magnate raised for military expeditions since no legal documents exist to define the term exactly. Using the sagas as sources, modern historians P.G. Foote and David Wilson believe that the *leiðangr* provided men and equipment for warfare through a system of assessment, while Rikke Malmros instead believes it was a public fleet levy for men to fight under the king's control, fighting in naval battles where ships were tied together or as amphibious troops for raiding.¹⁷

Historian Neil Lund presents an opposing argument. He doubts a *leiðangr* military system existed before the twelfth century and believed a *lið*, a term reflecting a magnate's personal troops, more accurately describes the military organization. He adds that a Norse army would be small even if several magnates combined their *liðs* into one expeditionary force (including that of Sveinn Forkbeard and Knútr's armies that conquered England early in the eleventh century). However, DeVries believes a synthesis of the two views more accurately represents the correct system. He believes Foote, Wilson, and Malmros rely too heavily on old Norse sources and Lund too quickly dismisses them. He further remarks that Haraldr Harðraði raised a force that filled an estimated 300 ships when he invaded England and that Haraldr would have picked up

University Press, 1999), 71; John France, *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 77-8.

¹⁷DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 201-2; Peter Foote and David Wilson, *The Viking Achievement* (New York, n.p., 1970), 280, as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 202; Rikke Malmros, "Leiðangr," in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. P. Pulsiano. (New York, n.p., 1993), 389, as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 202.

some ideas on raising troops when he was in the Varangian Guard in Constantinople. One of Haraldr's military actions against Denmark detailed in the *King Harald's Saga* supports DeVries' theory. When Haraldr expected to fight a large land battle against Sveinn's forces, he gathered a large levy of professional soldiers and a peasant levy. However, when Sveinn did not appear at the predetermined place, he decided to raid Denmark instead and dismissed most of the peasant levy.¹⁸

Three types of soldiers made up the Norwegian military. The first was the *húskalrs* (housecarls), the professional soldiers who provided armed service and performed as bodyguards in return for land. Another class was the *bóndaherinn* or *bóndi*, the "free farmer" who gave temporary service in the army for either offensive or defensive expeditions. The last group is included for its notoriety; they were not a third recruiting source. The *bersekgangr*, or berserkers, could either be soldiers who used alcohol or drugs to increase battle rage or ones who went into a fury during combat, and appear commonly in the sagas.¹⁹

Normandy did not have a centralized recruiting system, so Duke William's demesne vassals provided the core of his fighting forces, which he expanded by persuading bishops, abbots, and lay vassals to send their units to join him.²⁰ Vassals could owe

¹⁸Niels Lund, "The Danish Perspective." In *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*. Ed. D. Scragg (London, n.p., 1991), 119, as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 203; Niels Lund, "The Armies of Swein Forkbeard and Cunt: Leding or lið?" *Anglo-Saxon England* 15(1986): 118, as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 203; DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 204; Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, 34.

¹⁹ Foote and Wilson, *Viking Achievement*, 81, 100-1, 285, as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 204-5; DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 206.

²⁰ Marjorie Chibnall, "Military Service in Normandy before 1066," in *Anglo-Norman Warfare: Studies in Late Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman Military Organization and Warfare*, ed. Matthew Strickland, 1993 Reprint (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1992), 35; Gravett, *Hastings 1066: The Fall of Anglo-Saxon*

military service because of *beneficium*, a gift for service, or the *aoldium*, the hereditary tenure. Although some charters give centralized quotas and a time length of service, historian Marjorie Chibnall believes they reflect special negotiations or corruptions by later chroniclers since a standard feudal law did not exist at this time.²¹ A tenure holder could have an allegiance to two different lords, which led to problems if they declared war on each other.²² Once recruited, the knights were organized into groups of five or ten called *conrois* and then reorganized into larger groups under their *magistri militum*.²³ Archers and infantry came from the lower classes and either came with their lords or by themselves as mercenaries.²⁴

Historian R. Allen Brown describes an important part of the Norman military institution: the castle. The medieval castle had three functions: private residence, center for government administration, and symbol of authority. Not only did it provide a defensive structure, it could also serve as a garrison for attack. However, castles were expensive to maintain and despite an advantage in defense due to limited siege technology, they still needed a support army or could fall rather easily.²⁵ Duke William's career up to 1066 epitomizes the castle's importance to the Normans; castle sieges were

England, Osprey Military Campaign Series, ed. David G. Chandler, no. 13 (London: Osprey Publishing, 1992), 16.

²¹ Chibnall, "Military Service," 29-30, 34-5.

²² Gravett, *Hastings 1066*, 15.

²³ Chibnall, "Military Service," 35-6, 40.

²⁴ Gravett, *Hastings 1066*, 16.

²⁵ Brown, *The Normans and the Norman Conquest*, 41; France, *Western Warfare*, 77-8, 83, 95.

his most common military operation, and he built castles at Pevensey and Hastings as one of his first actions after landing in England in 1066.

Weapons and Armor

The English, Norwegians, and Normans had many types of military technology in common, including helmet, hauberk, shields, bow, spear, and sword. Although archaeology has unearthed few weapon artifacts from this period, the Bayeux Tapestry shows the weapons and armor used by the English and Normans, and could also apply to the Norwegians (see Figure 3). The Bayeux Tapestry does not depict Norman Infantry (besides the archers), but they must have been similar to the Anglo-Saxons and Norwegians (although the wealthier ones would have higher quality weapons and more armor). Infantry typically wore a conical helmet with a nosegard to protect the head, made of leather or metal depending on the wealth of the owner and consisting of either one piece or multiple plates. Military historian Paddy Griffith points out in *The Viking Art of War* to dispel a common misconception from the movies: Vikings did not wear helmets with horns on them. The heavy, tunic-shaped hauberk protected the mid-section, while the wearer's shoulders balanced the weight. Mail provided more protection from slashing than thrusting blows and could always be pierced, and did not cover some areas: the face, the hands, and the lower part of the legs.²⁶ The armor had alternating iron rings and rivets that decreased production time since the smith could combine two rows of rivets with a row of iron rings faster than rows of iron rings. Additionally, the smith could tailor the size to the wearer instead of designing the armor only after measuring an

²⁶Jim Bradbury, *The Battle of Hastings* (Phoenix Mill, England: Sutton Publishing, 1998), 79-80, 82; Paddy Griffith, *The Viking Art of War* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1995), 11.

individual.²⁷ Images located near the end of the Bayeux Tapestry's border indicate the hauberk's value: individuals without armor strip the dead of theirs (see Figure 22).

Cavalrymen's armor differed in two ways from the infantry's. The first one is four leather straps that form a rectangular pattern between the neck and underarms, used to help get the hauberk on, add another layer of mail to protect the upper chest, or hold a shield in place (see Figure 4).²⁸ The second variation extended the hauberk to knee-length with a fore and aft split, facilitating mounting the horse, giving additional comfort in the saddle, and protecting the leg effectively.²⁹ The shields for both infantry and cavalry consisted of wood with most shaped as a kite and a few as a convex circle, although all Norwegians were required to own a round shield and a few may have had the kite-shaped one (see Figure 5).³⁰ The Bayeux Tapestry depicts shields with designs that helped with identification during battle, but they were not heraldic (and modern historian Jim Bradbury believes this is why no one could identify Harold's mutilated body after the Battle of Hastings).³¹

²⁷Ian Peirce, "Arms, Armour and Warfare in the Eleventh Century," in *Anglo-Norman Studies X, Proceedings of the Battle Conference*, 1987, ed. R. Allen Brown (Wolfeboro, NH: Boydell Press, 1988), 237-8.

²⁸Bradbury, *Battle of Hastings*, 83-4.

²⁹Peirce, "Arms, Armor and Warfare," 238.

³⁰Bradbury, *Battle of Hastings*, 84-5; Johannes Brønsted, *The Vikings*, trans. K. Skov, (Harmondsworth, n.p., 1965), 123, as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 197, Foote and Wilson, *The Viking Achievement*, 278-9, as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 197; Else Rosedahl, *The Vikings*, Trans. S.M. Margeson and K. Williams (Harmondsworth, n.p., 1992), as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 197.

³¹Bradbury, *Battle of Hastings*, 86; Peirce, "Arms, Armour, and Warfare," 244.

The common weapons included the bow, spear, and sword (see Figures 3, 6, and 7).³² Infantry used the bow for long-range firepower (although the Bayeux Tapestry shows one Norman archer in pursuit of the English riding a horse after the battle ended).³³ The bows were either four-foot or man-height and drawn to the chest, meaning the range would not equal that of the later longbow, drawn to the ear.³⁴ The Bayeux Tapestry depicts the archers in small size and without armor (except for one Norman), reflecting that they were from the lower classes (see Figure 7). DeVries adds that the minimal mentioning of archers in the Norse sagas, except for the Battles of Fulford Gate and Stamford Bridge and Haraldr's use of a bow in the Battle of Niså, demonstrate that bows were not a "heroic" weapon and more likely for the lower class. Both infantry and cavalry used the spear for thrusting or throwing.³⁵ The javelin had a long, slender head while the spear had broad, leaf-shaped heads (see Figure 3).³⁶ Infantry and cavalry used swords for short-range fighting. They were designed for cutting instead of thrusting, and contained a guard to protect the hand from another blade sliding along its edge and a pommel that attached the handle to the blade and provided balance.³⁷ Although infantry armed with a sword and shield were effective, cavalry had two advantages: an elevated

³²Bradbury, *Battle of Hastings*, 87.

³³*The Bayeux Tapestry and the Norman Invasion, With an Introduction and a Translation From the Contemporary Account of William of Poitiers*, ed. Lewis Thorpe (London: The Folio Society, 1973), plate 79.

³⁴Peirce, "Arms, Armour, and Warfare," 248; Peter Poyntz Wright, *Hastings*, Great Battles Series (Gloucestershire, England: The Windrush Press, 1996), 62.

³⁵Bradbury, *Battle of Hastings*, 88, 92; DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 196-7.

³⁶Gravett, *Hastings, 1066*, 23.

³⁷Bradbury, *Battle of Hastings*, 87-8.

position for both attack and defense and a higher chance of inflicting casualties since even a passing blow could cause serious damage.³⁸

There were other weapons that were unique to England, Norway, and Normandy: axes, ships, and warhorses. The Englishmen and Norwegians used either the one-handed throwing axe or the larger two-handed battle axe, and since the Bayeux Tapestry depicts Earl Leofric Godwineson holding one, it may have been an aristocrat's weapon by this time period (see Figure 3).³⁹ An axeman had two vulnerabilities in combat: a deflected blow or miss would leave him open to attack and as a two-handed axeman raised his weapon, he would leave himself unguarded.⁴⁰

The Norwegian reliance on ships provides another difference. Due to their geographic position (see Figure 8), the Norwegians used ships to travel to continental Europe and England, and the ones discovered at Skuldelev, Denmark, provide an excellent representative of the different types (they are estimated to be from the year 1000, see Figure 9). Skuldelev #2 and #5 were probably the typical types of warships, designed to carry a number of crewmen (24 for the former, 52 for the latter) and were long (18 meters for the former, 29 for the latter), but not very deep. Two other types of ships represent how the Vikings moved cargo: Skuldelev #1 for ocean-going transport and Skuldelev #3 for inshore transport. They relied more on their sails for power and had deeper holds for cargo, which also meant they could not easily go ashore. They were also smaller than the

³⁸Peirce, "Arms, Armour, and Warfare," 251.

³⁹Bradbury, *Battle of Hastings*, 90-2; Brønsted, *The Vikings*, 122, as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 194-5; Foote and Wilson, *The Viking Achievement*, 277, as cited DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 194-5.

⁴⁰Peirce, "Arms, Armour, and Warfare," 246.

warships, Skuldelev #1 being 17 meters long and needing very few oars and the latter being 14 meters long and requiring only 10 crewmen.⁴¹

The most important weapons the Normans brought with them were warhorses, which took years of breeding and training to develop. Cavalrymen trained from puberty to ride warhorse because according to a ninth century proverb, it was tougher for the men to learn as they got older.⁴² The Normans also required three types of lesser horses (see Figure 5): one to ride so that the warhorse would not be tired before battle, one for the squire, and one for baggage (although William probably set a limit on taking horses across the English Channel). The Norman willingness to maintain the horses at high expense at Dives and Saint Valéry and the extra cost to ferry them across the English Channel demonstrates their value to the army. Contemporary Norman records in charters and wills give the value of horses while English ones treat them all as equal, which provide another indicator that Normans placed much emphasis on horses and their quality. For example, in Æthelstan's will, he only used colors to describe horses. In the 1020s and 1030s, the Normans made a transition from using vague terms like "great" or "very great" to differentiate the types of horses in charters and wills to specific monetary values such as 14 shillings, 6 pence, 30 pounds.⁴³

⁴¹Griffith, *The Viking Art of War*, 89-93.

⁴²Bradbury, *Battle of Hastings*, 93, 104

⁴³ R.H.C. Davis, "The Warhorses of the Normans," in *Anglo-Norman Studies X: The Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1987*, ed. R. Allen Brown (Wolfeboro, New Hampshire: The Boydell Press, 1988), 79-81.

The English, Norwegian, and Norman Ways of War

The methods used to raise troops and the types of weapons available combined with other factors such as geography and military tradition to dictate strategy and tactics.

On a strategic level, the English relied on the water to protect them from their continental neighbors and fortifications on the marches to protect them from hostile neighbors such as Wales and Scotland, although they were not as advanced as the motte and bailey castles the Normans would build later. Most often, the ship and land fyrds worked together to protect England, such as placing troops in strategic locations or by cooperation between the fleet and the coastal defenses.⁴⁴

In battle, the housecarls and thegns dismounted to fight, and formed a shield wall, densely formed with individuals spaced far enough apart to yield their battle axes.⁴⁵ The English used horses only for raids and pursuits after battle.⁴⁶ A *fyrð* had a fragile morale due to the high number of part-time soldiers. The best warriors formed the front rank to keep the shield wall's cohesion as long as possible. A leader's death could also break down discipline, demonstrated by the Battles of Maldon and Hastings: the English armies collapsed after their leaders died in battle (Earl Byrhtnoth in the former and King Harold in the latter).⁴⁷

Historian Paddy Griffith believes the Norse had four types of warfare. In "saga warfare," the Norsemen conducted personal small-scale violence operations, such as

⁴⁴C.W. Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions*, 127, 142-3.

⁴⁵Hooper, "Anglo-Saxon Warfare," 92.

⁴⁶Bradbury, *Battle of Hastings*, 107-8.

⁴⁷Hooper, "Anglo-Saxon Warfare," 92-3.

blood feuds. In a “royal household action,” the king traveled throughout his kingdom to collect taxes and settle legal disputes, using an armed force if any problems could not be settled peacefully. In “Going A-Viking,” anyone who could put together a band of warriors would raid on land or attack at sea, and did not need royal backing, and usually the Vikings were outnumbered. The fourth type, “Royal Army Campaigning,” included the king mustering forces and then attacking other areas for political reasons such as a dynastic struggle or to extract money from a foreign area or locality. Griffith questions the Norsemen’s skill at ocean sailing due to the high number of shipwrecks (although this is more likely attributable to the inherent risks of sailing such as bad weather and piracy) and discoveries made by lost explorers, but still respects their ability in coastal sailing. These primarily “amphibious warriors” also had to leave a contingent to guard their ships when they attacked over land since it was their way to get back home, and used horses (if available) and roads to get where they needed to go. They would also winter off the coast of whatever territory they invaded (on an island such as the Orkneys), to prevent a land’s inhabitants from easily attacking them. As military historian H.B. Clarke has noted, the small number of Norsemen on an expedition placed them at a disadvantage, so their main goals in warfare were to avoid pitched battles and strike unexpectedly.⁴⁸

When the Norsemen had to fight a battle, they usually fought in the following manner. To announce the beginning of battle, the Norwegians would blow on horns and try to shake the enemy’s morale.⁴⁹ The Norwegians would normally open battle with an arrow

⁴⁸Griffith, *The Viking Art of War*, 82, 98-109, 115-6, 118; H.B. Clarke, “The Vikings,” in *Medieval Warfare, A History*, ed. Maurice Keen (New York, Oxford University Press, 1999), 45.

⁴⁹Rudolf Poertner, *The Vikings: Rise and Fall of the Norse Sea Kings*, (London, n.p. 1975), 151, as cited in Devries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 200.

and then a spear barrage, presumably to form holes in the enemy's formation. They would then follow this with the hand-to-hand combat.⁵⁰ The importance Vikings placed on individual valor may have been demonstrated by silk ribbons embroidered with gold, believed by historians such as DeVries, Johannes Brønsted, Else Rosedahl and Henry R. Loyn to be rewards for military service.⁵¹

The Norman strategy utilized castles, and the term "castellans" describe their owners. John Gillingham states the advantage of being a castellan, "the right to tax, justice, and profits of lordship fell into the hands of the castellans."⁵² However, the castellan's loyalty was doubtful since he may have feudal obligations to more than one lord, and the castles became the focal point of military campaigns. Castles that were supported by a network of other castles and a supporting garrison were nearly impregnable. A landowning noble, whether king or duke, would have to set up or capture castles in important locations such as borders to maintain power over a territory, launching cavalry raids on the nearby territories.⁵³ During a siege, quick sorties from the castle against the besiegers were a way to destroy vulnerable siege engines. This paradigm of warfare explains why William immediately built fortifications at Pevensey and Hastings when he invaded England.

⁵⁰Griffith, *The Viking Art of War*, 164-5, 182-96; Brønsted, *The Vikings*, 103-4, as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, p. 207.

⁵¹Brønsted, *The Vikings*, 204-7, as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 200; Rosedahl, *The Vikings*, 145-6, as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 200; Henry R. Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain* (Oxford, n.p., 1994), 145, as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 200.

⁵²John Gillingham, "An Age of Expansion," 70.

⁵³France, *Western Warfare*, 52, 102-4.

In a set-piece battle, the Normans usually set up their forces in the following manner. Archers lined up in front of the battle lines to break up the enemy formation.⁵⁴ Infantry's greatest attribute was defense: they expanded an army's numbers and allowed an army to hold ground, but it were very vulnerable to attack by cavalry if broken up.⁵⁵ The elite made up the cavalry forces because of the expense and training required. Modern historians disagree over the sophistication of cavalry tactics. Jim Bradbury states that although the Bayeux Tapestry depicts some cavalry with couched lances, most would hold the spear overhead since cavalry organization was loose and unorganized and could not perform an effective charge.⁵⁶ John Gillingham disagrees and argues that Norman cavalry had excellent discipline demonstrated by the attack and feigned retreats at Hastings and earlier in 1053 against King Henry I.⁵⁷ Ian Pierce adds that Norman saddles were deep, giving the rider a stable platform to prevent unhorsing, and long stirrups helped the rider to stand up and take advantage of a sword slash or lance thrust.⁵⁸ Cavalry riding against other cavalry could use the couched lance to great effect, but it needed help breaking up well-formed infantry. Not until pursuing or finishing off infantry could the cavalry prove destructive.⁵⁹ The cavalry added flexibility to an army

⁵⁴Jim Bradbury, *The Battle of Hastings*, 104.

⁵⁵France, *Western Warfare*, 161.

⁵⁶Bradbury, *Battle of Hastings*, 89-90.

⁵⁷John Gillingham, "William the Bastard at War," in *Anglo-Norman Warfare: Studies in Late Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman Military Organization and Warfare*, ed. Matthew Strickland, 1993 Reprint (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1992), 156.

⁵⁸Ian Peirce, "Arms, Armour, and Warfare in the Eleventh Century," 245.

⁵⁹Gillingham, "An Age of Expansion," 78.

in battle, but the archers and infantry provided the mass of the army and had to break up enemy formations for the cavalry to exploit.

The English and the Norwegians had a similar system to gather men for war and in fighting. Whether called a *fyrð* or *leiðangr*, men were called to serve in either armies or navies for offensive and defensive campaigns. The Norman duke relied more on alliances with other magnates to provide soldiers, made more difficult since a vassal's loyalty could change to support a magnate outside the province or a French king (a situation covered more completely in the next chapter). Another major difference shows up in the military organization. In the English and Norwegian armies, the nobles fought dismounted and formed a shield wall, while in the Norman army the nobles remained mounted and fought in cavalry units. This difference gave the Normans an advantage only if they could break up the enemy's infantry formation, because horses do not charge walls, even human ones. The Norwegians, more so than the English, made the fleet an important part of their strategy for transport and port protection, which also reflects the importance of sea-based trade to them. The Normans emphasized the castle in their strategy, which also ties in to their reliance on cavalry. Obviously horses were not good in besieging castles, but they had other useful functions. Normans used horses to raid a local area to prevent supplies from getting into a castle, to lead sorties against besiegers, and to scout.

The infantry and cavalrymen used similar types of weapons. They preferred to throw spears at a distance and then fight hand-to-hand with swords. The cavalry occasionally used the spear in a couched position, but it would be effective only after the enemy formation's shield wall fell apart. The wealthy would have the most protection, including

helmet, mail armor, and shields, while the poor would normally have leather armor and a shield. The English, Norwegian, and Norman armies also contained archers from the lower classes, who are not usually mentioned in the primary sources.

England had an excellent system for defending itself. It could react to an invasion quickly and efficiently, and its soldiers could fight well against enemy infantry and cavalry as long as they maintained their shield wall. For invading, the Norwegians had the best type of transportation available and years of sea-based military expedition experience. The Normans were at a disadvantage in transporting their army across the channel and ensuring the loyalty of their soldiers to Duke William. The Normans had a vast amount of experience in castle warfare, but it could take years to successfully besiege a castle and the Normans could not stay in England that long. Duke William's eventual victory was not a foregone conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

WARLORD BIOGRAPHIES AND SUCCESSION DISPUTE

Judging Harold Godwineson as military commander solely for his loss at one battle ignores his accomplishments as an earl and a king, including his performance until he became a Battle of Hastings casualty. Exploring the military and political backgrounds of Harold and his opponents Haraldr and William will determine the strengths and weaknesses of each individual going into the campaigns of 1066. At the end of the chapter, the section on the succession dispute reviews the claims of these three warlords and other potential rivals, setting up the political background that resulted in the violence of 1066.

Harold Godwineson's Military and Political Background

Harold Godwineson's military expeditions and political maneuvering throughout his life demonstrate that he had the potential to be a successful English king. His father's revolt against King Edward, Harold's expeditions against the Welsh, and his brother Tostig's experience against the Scottish taught him lessons in keeping England free from civil war and rebellion and better prepared to repel invasions.

Harold may have learned from his grandfather Wulfnoth how feuds between nobles could detract from military power. In 1009, King Æthelred assembled a large navy to prevent further Danish invasions. Earl Eadric's brother Beorhtric made an accusation against Wulfnoth, who departed with 20 ships to raid the southern English coast. Beorhtric followed him with 80 ships in an effort to punish him, but a large storm caused

his ships to run aground and then Wulfnoð burned the helpless ships. When the news reached King Æthelred, he and his nobles decided to disband the fleet. Later that year, the Danish Viking Thorkell the Tall raided the coasts of Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, and Berkshire, and spent the winter in southeast England.¹ When the northern provinces of Northumbria and Mercia rebelled in 1065 due to Earl Tostig's behavior, Harold might have remembered this example as a reason to back the northerners instead of his brother. He wanted to prevent internal discord to lower the risk of foreign raids or invasion.

Wulfnoth's son Godwine became an earl under King Knútr, and continued during the reigns of his sons Harold (1035-1040) and Harðaknútr (1040-2) and Æthelred's son (by his Norman wife Emma) Edward (1042-1066). Until his death in 1053, he demonstrated his preference for a Scandinavian over Norman influence, and convinced King Edward to install his sons as earls in important locations and to marry his daughter. According to chronicler William of Jumièges, Edward, (Æthelred's oldest son by Emma and in exile in her homeland of Normandy), led an invasion into England to try to retake the country after Knútr's death in 1036. He successfully plundered the area, but decided that he needed a bigger force to invade and returned to Normandy. Meanwhile Alfred (Æthelred's youngest son), who also lived in exile in Normandy, led a military expedition against King Harold, but Godwine captured him and according to Harold's wishes, had him tortured and executed (although the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle states that he entered England to visit his mother Emma, who married Knútr after Æthelred's death), most

¹*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, The Everyman Library, trans. G.N. Garmonsway (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1972), Version E, 1009.

likely an example to others who wanted to raid England.² Godwine proved his loyalty to the King of England and showed he could defend the borders against raids and invasions, but his murder of Alfred would cause hard feelings later with his older brother Edward the future king. After Edward's accession to the throne, he granted Godwine's family influential positions in return for the earl's support. The oldest son Swegen became Earl of Herefordshire in 1043 (see Figure 10), a shire that bordered Wales and responsible for keeping the Welsh from raiding. A year later, Edward appointed the next oldest son Harold as Earl of East Anglia, and in 1045 he married Godwine's daughter Eadgyða.

Swegen would provide Harold good and bad examples of being an earl. In 1046, Swegen had military and political success against Wales, but also made his first major political mistake. He made peace with King Gruffydd ap Llywelyn of north Wales and joined him on an expedition to attack the territory of King Gruffydd ap Rhydderch of South Wales. On the way home, he had the abbess of Leofminster brought to him, "kept her as long as he pleased," and then sent her back, leading to his exile the following year in Flanders and then Denmark. In 1049, he returned and made peace with King Edward, but his brother Harold and Earl Beorn objected. Swegen convinced Beorn to go with him from Pevensey to Sandwich to meet the king and make peace, but Swegen and his men took Beorn on board a ship and killed him, which resulted in his second major political mistake. The atrocity of killing an earl added to the fact that Beorn was Swegen's first cousin forced him to leave for Flanders, although John of Worcester reported that King

² *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version C and D, 1036; William of Jumièges, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* of William of Jumièges, Robert Torigni, and Orderic Vitalis, 2 vols., trans. Elisabeth C.M. van Houts, vol 2, books V-VIII (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 7.6(9); Simon Keynes, "The Aethelings in Normandy," in *Anglo-Norman Studies XIII, Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1990*, ed. Marjorie Chibnall (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1991), 176, 194-6, 198.

Edward and Swegen made peace later in the year.³ Harold must have remembered the conduct of Swegen when he later dealt with Tostig in 1065: an earl (even a relative) who acts outrageously must be removed from power to prevent political instability.

In 1051, events led King Edward to have to choose between his Norman advisors and Godwine and his family, resulting in exile of the losing faction. The Norman Count Eustace of Bologne (who was married to King Edward's sister) and his men fought against the inhabitants in Dover over some misunderstanding, resulting in deaths on both sides. King Edward protected the count and demanded that Godwine punish Dover, while Godwine countered by protecting Dover and demanding King Edward punish the count. Godwine and his sons Swegen and Harold raised forces and advanced on the king as a show of military power, while Edward asked the northern earls Siward of Northumbria and Leofric of Mercia for their support. The English magnates on both sides met, and decided that a civil war would weaken the country and leave England open for invasion, so they tried to settle the matter peacefully. The first council declared Swegen an outlaw (presumably for his crimes of abducting an abbess and killing Beorn), and the second council exiled the remainder of the Godwine family except for Queen Eadgyðā (whom King Edward placed in a nunnery). Godwine, Tostig, and Gyrð went to Flanders, while Harold and Leofwine went to Ireland; whether the king gave them safe passage or they escaped before they could be captured is debatable. While in exile, the Godwine family prepared for raiding England the following year. According to the *Vita Ædwardi Regis*, in the autumn of 1051, Tostig married Judith, daughter of Count

³*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version C, 1046, 1049, Version D, 1049, Version E, 1045, 1047, 1049; John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 1049.

Baldwin, strengthening relations between the Godwine family and Flanders. With Godwine and his family gone, King Edward replaced them with new men, and Version D of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and John of Worcester state that Duke William of Normandy visited him at this time.⁴ Godwine realized that he needed the northern earls' support to go against the king and his Norman favorites. Without this alliance, he could not use his political or military power effectively.

In 1052, Godwine and his family returned to England. Three major raids occurred that year: King Gruffydd of Wales' into Herefordshire, Harold's into Devonshire and Somerset in southwest England, and Godwine's into Isle of Wight and the surrounding area. The earl charged with protecting the Welsh border failed, and King Gruffydd returned loaded with booty. The earls Odda and Ralph led a fleet to find and destroy Godwine's in the English Channel, but eventually they returned to Sandwich and disbanded it. Harold and Godwine merged their forces, raided Kent and Sussex to get provisions and gather more strength, and then sailed to London unopposed by the northern earls. Again, the English magnates met, but this time they restored Godwine, Harold, and Eadgyða to their former positions of power and exiled the Normans. Fortunately for England's political situation, Swegen had gone on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and died on the way back, preventing any disputes between the king (or Harold, who objected the first time Swegen regained his earldom) and Godwine.⁵ King

⁴*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Versions D and E, 1051; *Vita Ædwardi Regis, The Life of King Edward*, Ed. and Trans. Frank Barlow, Medieval Text Series, ed. V.H. Galbraith, R.A.B. Mynors, and C.N.L. Brooke (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd, 1962), 1.4; John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 1051.

⁵*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Versions C, D E, and F, 1052.

Edward gave the earldoms back to Godwine and his sons for two major reasons. His new earls could not keep the Welsh and the Godwines from raiding, failing in their duty to protect their territories, and he thought the Godwine family could do better. The other reason was that the northern earls did not help protect Edward with military support when the Godwine family arrived in London. Harold learned three things from the events of 1051 and 1052. He observed that a ruler's success depended on protecting his borders from raids or invasions, which the replacement earls failed to do. Another lesson was that the military support of the northern English earls was essential for court influence. The northern earls' backing of Edward resulted in the Godwine family exile, and the lack of backing allowed the Godwine family to return. Finally, he realized that in times of political instability England would be highly susceptible to foreign raids or invasions, as demonstrated by King Gruffydd's raid.

The Welsh raids in the following demonstrated King Edward did well in placing Godwinesons in positions of power. In 1053, Godwine passed away and Harold took his place as Earl of Wessex, and East Anglia went to Ælfgar (see Figure 10). Two years later, King Edward appointed Tostig Earl of Northumbria when Siward died (Siward's son had died in 1054 when Siward attacked Macbeth in Scotland and placed Malcom III on the throne). This increased the political influence of the Godwinesons because they controlled two of the four major earldoms, and a southern family now had influence in a northern earldom, increasing their political options. During this same year, the Ælfgar, exiled for a supposed minor charge, joined the Welsh on a raid of England. John of Worcester wrote that Earl Harold retaliated with an attack on Wales, and then he, Ælfgar, and King Gruffydd made a settlement, resulting in King Edward renaming Ælfgar earl in

East Anglia. In 1058, King Edward exiled Ælfgar a second time, but he received help from King Gruffydd and a Norwegian fleet, again receiving his earldom back by force (another example besides the events of 1051 for Tostig to follow after he was outlawed from his earldom).⁶

In 1063, Harold and Tostig led a raid into Wales against King Gruffydd ap Llweyen. While before 1056 Gruffydd raided England constantly, no raids are mentioned after 1056, and his marriage to Ælfgar's daughter Ealdyð possibly demonstrates an alliance between the Welsh king and English earl. Historian Kelly DeVries suggests that Earl Ælfgar's death led to the invasion, since he possibly died just before or during this year; the last mention of him are Anglo-Saxon charters that he signed as a witness in 1062. Modern historians E.A. Freeman and Frank Barlow believe that Gruffydd would renew his raids on Mercia once Ælfgar passed away and to prevent this, Harold and Tostig struck first. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Version D gives the following account:

...earl Harold marched from Gloucester to Rhuddland, the seat of Gruffydd, and burnt his residence, his ships and all their sails, and put him to flight. Then, towards Rogation days, Harold sailed with a fleet from Bristol, round Wales, and the Welsh made peace with him and gave hostages. Meanwhile, Tostig marched against them with land levies, and overran the country.

John of Worcester adds that Tostig's troops were mounted, which enabled them to travel more quickly and showed that the English used horses. The invasion paid immediate benefits. Later that year, Gruffydd's men killed him and delivered his head to Harold, so King Edward "entrusted that country to [Gruffydd's] two brothers, Bleddyn and Rhiwallon: They gave hostages to the king and to the earl and swore oaths that they

⁶The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Version C, 1053, 1055, Version D 1053, 1055, Version E 1053, 1055; John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 1054-55, 1058.

would be loyal to him in all things, ready to serve him everywhere on sea and land, and to render such tribute from that country as had formerly been paid to their late king.”

According to Gerald of Wales, the invasion was so devastating and thorough that the first three Norman kings did not have to worry raids from Wales.⁷ The invasion also had other legacies. Earl Edwin, who took over Mercia from his dead father, learned how dangerous the alliance between Tostig’s Northumbria and Harold’s Wessex could be, and those earldoms surrounded his. The invasion also showcased Harold’s ability to strike at an enemy quickly and off-guard, which he would repeat for the Battle of Stamford Bridge. Finally, as DeVries notes, it showed that Harold and Tostig deserved their positions as earls since they could use military force to protect their areas of control.⁸

Relations between Harold and Tostig would soon sour. Trouble broke out in 1065 when Northumbria revolted against Tostig and demanded Morcar as their new earl with support from his brother Edwin and the Welsh.⁹ According to John of Worcester, the main impetus of the revolt was Tostig’s slaughter of political rivals Gamel and Ulf under a peace treaty and a large tribute levied on Northumbria. Earl Edwin joined his brother Morcar and the Northumbrian rebels and began to march on London. King Edward sent Harold to negotiate with them, and they convinced him to support them over Tostig,

⁷*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version E, 1063; Frank Barlow, *Edward the Confessor* (Los Angeles, n.p., 1970), 210-1, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 144-5; E.A. Freeman, *Norman Conquest*, II:465, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 144-5; DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 144; Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Kambriae et descriptio Kambraie*, ed. J.F. Dimock, Rolls Series (London, n.p., 1868), 217-8, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 146; John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 1063.

⁸DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 147.

⁹*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Versions C, D, and E, 1065.

leading to Tostig's exile in Flanders.¹⁰ The English sources take sides in the conflict; the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* accuse Tostig of tyranny, while the *Life of King Edward* blames Northumbrian nobles "whom he had repressed with a heavy yoke for their misdeeds."¹¹ To seal the arrangement, Harold married Ealdyð, Edwin and Morcar's sister and widow of King Gruffydd.¹² Modern historians differ on their view why Harold supported Edwin and Morcar instead of Tostig. Historian N.J. Higham suggests that Harold perceived an opportunity to set up a political alliance to support his succession to the throne, and in return gave Edwin and Morcar greater influence at court. King Harold biographer Ian Walker makes a stronger argument that Harold wanted to avoid civil war, believing Northumbria had a good case against Tostig, and convinced King Edward, Queen Eadgyð, and his other brothers to support Tostig's replacement.¹³ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* supports this view, stating that as part of the settlement King Edward "re-enacted there the laws of King Knútr," suggesting neither Harold nor Edward wanted to discontent the northern inhabitants who had a strong link to Scandinavia, and then push them to look for Norwegian or Danish allies.¹⁴ Haraldr had sacrificed Tostig's loyalty, whom he had fought the Welsh campaign with, for political stability with

¹⁰Ibid; John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 1065.

¹¹*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Versions C, D, and E, 1065; "The Life of King Edward," in *The Norman Conquest*, ed. R. Allen Brown, *Documents of Medieval History*, ed. G.W.S. Barrow and Edward Miller, no. 5. (Baltimore, MD: Edward Arnold, 1984), 1.122.

¹²Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, 164-7.

¹³Ian W. Walker, *Harold: The Last Anglo-Saxon King* (Thrupp, England: Sutton Publishing, 1997), 108-115.

¹⁴*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version D, 1065.

Northumbria and Mercia. Although he might have caused some rifts in the Godwineson family, his political decision would prove correct during the Norwegian invasion of 1066.

King Edward became ill and died at the onset of 1066. According to the *Vita Ædwardi*, King Edward told Harold on his deathbed, "I commend . . . all the kingdom to your protection."¹⁵ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* remarks that Harold also had the backing of the *Witanagemot*, "Earl Harold succeeded the kingdom as the king granted it to him and as he was elected thereto."¹⁶ Harold had the consent of the former king and the English magnates to rule, and he would attempt to continue the two roles he excelled in, securing peace in England and keeping invaders out.

Haraldr Harðráði's (Sigurðarson) Military and Political Background

As a mercenary in Kiev and Constantinople, Haraldr had gained more military experience in battles and sieges than either William or Harold. As the ruler of Norway, he conducted more battles and raids against other Norwegian magnates, the Swedes, and the Danes, to secure his position as king. He also participated in naval battles, which neither William nor Harold ever did. He showed astuteness and intelligence in overtaking fortified cities, raiding Denmark to increase his wealth, and increasing his political power at the expense of others (such as Magnús Olaffson and Hakon Ivarsson).

The Norwegian sources begin Haraldr's life story with the Battle of Stiklasðar (1030), fought by Olafr Haraldsson against Knútr, who had deposed Olafr as king of Norway in 1028. Demonstrating his first step as a formidable soldier, the sagas say he performed well in the battle but was severely wounded. After his recovery, he and Earl of Orkney,

¹⁵*Vita Ædwardi*, 2.

¹⁶*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version E, 1066.

Rognvaldr Brúsason, wintered in Sweden and then traveled to Kiev. In Kiev, Haraldr and Rognvaldr's son Eilif commanded King Jaroslav's defense forces, although the *Morkinskinna* only lists Haraldr as the commander. Kiev enticed Haraldr for a few reasons. King Jaroslav had earlier kept Haraldr's nephew Magnus Olafsson in his court, and Haraldr probably heard stories of what life was like there. Additionally, Jaroslav's wife Queen Ingigerðr was the daughter of King Óláfr of Sweden, where he had just wintered, and he probably convinced Haraldr to go to Kiev. He soon left for Constantinople to become a mercenary. *Morkinskinna* gives the reason that Haraldr had fallen in love with the Princess Elisabeth, but Jaroslav would not allow him to marry her until he increased his wealth and reputation.¹⁷

The *Morkinskinna* states that Haraldr hid his identity once he arrived in Constantinople and called himself Norðbrikt, but the *King Harald's saga* mentions that he presented himself to the Emperor and said that he wanted to keep his mercenary company intact. Eventually, Haraldr became the acknowledged leader of the Varangian guard, a group of northern mercenaries from Russia and Scandinavian countries. To increase the reputation of himself and his men, Haraldr would form up his men against the opponent's weak side and charge with fury, easily gaining victory and improving his troops' morale. He campaigned with the Byzantine General Georgios Maniaces on the Aegean Sea, but after Georgios returned to Constantinople, Haraldr continued fighting in Africa to pillage and plunder, sending the money he did not use for military expenditures to Kiev for

¹⁷ Snorri Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga, Harald Hardradi of Norway, from Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla*, trans. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson (New York: Penguin, 1966), 1-2; *Morkinskinna*, 1,9.

safekeeping (or possibly to enhance his reputation with Jaroslav or Elisabeth).¹⁸ Earlier he had to share success with Georgios, but in Africa he could keep the glory for himself.

Haraldr also went on campaigns in Sicily, trying to overtake impressive fortifications instead of fighting conventional battles. Instead of a chain of long sieges, he implemented several methods of trickery to quickly enter a city. In one example, he told his men to start a rumor that he was ill, and made sure the city dwellers knew it. After a short time, he “died,” and the other expedition leaders asked if they could bring in a small number of men into the city to give him a proper burial. The city leaders agreed, and once the Varangians brought the coffin into the town, they dropped it and pulled out their weapons, which was a sign for the other men to storm the city. After the Sicily campaigns, he went on an expedition to Jerusalem. Norse sources say that Haraldr overtook the city and nearby towns, but DeVries gives the more likely scenario that he provided a military escort to Empress Zoe on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Once back in Constantinople, the Emperor and Empress imprisoned Haraldr for taking more than his allotted share of plunder and making advances on their niece Maria (the sagas claim he planned to marry her). Since Emperor Michael IV’s died and Michael V recently took over the throne, DeVries argues convincingly that the imprisonment was probably for political reasons. Factional fighting in Constantinople also explains what occurs next: a woman (possibly a noble or representing a group of nobles loyal to the Empress Zoe) helped Haraldr escape. Next Haraldr led his loyal Varangians in an attack on the Varangians protecting the Emperor, and then blinded Michael V (possibly in retaliation for imprisoning Haraldr). He left Constantinople, guaranteeing his safety by abducting

¹⁸Sturluson, *King Harald’s Saga*, 3-11; *Morkinskinna*, 10-11; DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 30-1.

Maria and ramming over the chains in the harbor, and returned to Kiev.¹⁹ During his time in Constantinople, Haraldr learned how to conduct sieges and battles, and demonstrated an astuteness to eliminate political rivals.

Once in Kiev, Haraldr gathered his treasure and married Elisabeth. More importantly for his political career, he conspired with Earl Sveinn Ulfsson to fight against King Magnus Olafsson (Haraldr's nephew), who ruled Norway and then Denmark after Harðaknútr's death. Sveinn's earlier attempt to defeat Magnus failed, and though Magnus offered to let Sveinn rule as a regent in Denmark, he had a succession claim in his own right (he was related to King Knútr). Sveinn and Haraldr led raids on Denmark, prompting Magnus to raise troops against them. According to the chronicle of John of Worcester, this prevented an anticipated invasion by Magnus on England, which caused King Edward to raise a fleet in Sandwich in 1045. However, Magnus offered Haraldr a co-rulership of Norway if he broke his alliance with Sveinn, which he accepted. For the next two years, the two kings maintained separate courts and on a few occasions had disagreements, but none that resulted in civil war. Haraldr probably did not have popular support in Norway, or he would have found a way to eliminate Magnus as a rival. In 1047, they decided to invade Denmark and attack Sveinn, who fled east to Sweden. However, Magnus got ill and died, leaving Norway to Haraldr and Denmark to Sveinn. Haraldr, however, wanted both kingdoms for himself.²⁰

¹⁹Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, 11-15; *Morkinskinna*, 11-13; DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 33-7.

²⁰Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, 16-28; *Morkinskinna*, 13-27; John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 1045.

Haraldr attended the Viborg Assembly, a meeting of the Danish magnates, and attempted to declare himself king of Denmark, backed by the power of his army. He could not get support from other powerful Norwegian magnates, such as Einarr Þambarskelfir who stated he would rather “serve King Magnus in death than any other king alive,” and many Norwegian magnates agreed with him. At this point, Haraldr realized he would have to settle his affairs in Norway before attempting to attack Denmark, and the magnates officially elected him King of Norway at the Þrándheimr Assembly. When Sveinn heard that Magnus had died, he returned to Denmark with his army, and the Viborg Assembly voted him king. During his reign, Haraldr would have to contend with two main opponents during the following years of conflict: Descendents of Earl Hakon the Powerful (ruler of Norway from 975-995) and Sveinn in Denmark.²¹

If Haraldr could not take over Denmark by force, he planned to drain them financially. In 1048, Haraldr led the first of his many raids upon Denmark. He mobilized his forces, and according to chronicler Snorri Sturluson, he used half to raid Denmark and left the other half to protect Norway. He attacked the residence of Þorkell geysa, the man who crowned Sveinn king, and kidnapped his daughters for a large ransom (supposedly one of his daughters commented that the Norwegian fleet had anchors of crumbling cheese, apparently an extremely derogatory insult in medieval Norway). He spent the remaining summer and following summer plundering Denmark. During one of the following years, Sveinn arranged to meet Haraldr to fight a decisive battle on the Gota River, but then Sveinn did not show (see Figure 8). Haraldr released his peasant levies and then raided

²¹Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, 29-31; *Morkinskinna*, 27-29; DeVires, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 52.

Denmark as he normally did. Before he returned to Norway, Sveinn showed up with his army to fight a land battle against a smaller Norwegian force and attempted to retake all that Haraldr and his men plundered. Haraldr took the safer course and sailed back to Norway as fast as he could, although his ships were bigger and slower. As the Danish ships approached, he ordered his men to toss items overboard to make the ships lighter and then move faster. Haraldr outran the Danes and made it back, losing only a few ships.²² The decisive battle did not occur, so Haraldr continue his raids on Denmark.

King Haraldr also had problems keeping his Norwegian magnates under his control, especially those whose power bases were in the northern end of Norway. Sturluson remarks on how Haraldr politically manipulated his magnates to his advantage, which resulted in his most powerful magnates going to Denmark. He had Einarr and his son Eindriði, the leaders of a rival political family, killed and then tried to set up a peace with their successor Hakon Ivarsson before a civil war broke out (Remember what happened to Tostig when he executed members of a rival political family in Northumbria?). He sent Finn Arnason to negotiate with Hakon, and everyone tried to get something in return: Haraldr wanted peace with the north, Finn wanted the recall of his brother Kalf Arnason, who was exiled for fighting against King Olaf at the Battle of Stiklestad, and Hakon wanted to marry Ragnhildr, the daughter of King Magnús. Haraldr would not allow Ragnhildr to marry Hakon, so he left to serve Sveinn and took over Denmark's coastal defenses. However, Hakon did not stay there long. Sveinn's nephew Asmund plundered Denmark, and when the people complained, he said they should seek Hakon,

²² Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, 32-35; *Morkinskinna*, 31.

whom he said, “shuns all the places where he thinks there might be any danger.” Hakon heard this and hunted down Asmund, delivered his head to Sveinn, and then returned to Norway. Meanwhile, Haraldr caused problems with Finnrr. After Kalf returned to Norway, Haraldr sent him on a raid against the Danes on which he was killed. Finnrr accused Haraldr of intentionally killing Kalf off, and left to join Sveinn’s service and was appointed to defend the coast from Norwegian invaders. Although Haraldr showed willingness to compromise with his political rivals, more often he would take steps to eliminate his northern rivals if he could get an advantage.

During these years, King Haraldr mainly intended to raid and plunder the coast (founding Oslo so he would have a good logistical base to launch raids into Denmark, see Figure 10). During the winter of 1061, he informed Sveinn that he wanted to fight a conclusive battle the following spring to settle who would be the king of Denmark and Norway, possibly because the previous attempt failed.²³ Haraldr raised a full levy and sailed towards the Gota River. Again, Sveinn was not there, so Haraldr sent home the farmer’s levy and kept only 150 ships. Haraldr continued to raid Halland, and Sveinn’s 300 ships discovered him at Lófufjorðr. Although outnumbered, this time Haraldr decided to stay and fight instead of returning to Norway. King Haraldr’s placed his ship at the center of the line, with Marshal Ulf’s next to him, and Earl Hakon and his contingent at one of the wings. Facing Haraldr in the center were Sveinn and Finnrr. On both sides, the ships in the center were bound together with either ropes or chains.

²³Sturluson, *King Harald’s Saga*, 44-58. The *Morkinskinna* contains none of the information in this paragraph, only stating that Finnrr left Norway after Haraldr killed Einarr and Eindriði and Hakon met Haraldr in Denmark during this campaign and joined him, 35, 41.

Although Haraldr had fewer ships, they were big, so the two lines of ships were nearly equal in length.²⁴

Haraldr had the trumpets blown to begin the battle. According to Sturluson, the battle began in the afternoon, but *Morkinskinna* said it commenced in the evening, and both sources agree it lasted throughout the night. Earl Hakon grappled onto the Danish free ships on the edges and cleared them of their men. He also sailed to areas where he thought reinforcement was needed to keep the Danes from routing the Norwegians. Meanwhile, Haraldr and Sveinn's ships neared each other, and after intense fighting, Haraldr's men boarded Sveinn's ship. Once Sveinn's banner fell, the remaining Danish ships tried to unchain themselves and sail away, while many men aboard the chained ships jumped overboard since *Morkinskinna* reports that the battle was fought close to the shore. Haraldr pursued the fleeing Danes into the open sea while Hakon remained behind because a number of ships acted as obstacles in the fjord. According to *King Harald's Saga*, Sveinn boarded Hakon's ship in disguise and requested Hakon's assistance to the shore, although *Morkinskinna* only mentions that Sveinn sailed to the shore and escaped. The *Morkinskinna* also adds that young Prince Magnus and a companion took their ships to the shore to fight a land battle against the Danes but lost. The *King Haraldr's Saga* adds that Haraldr released his political enemy Finn in Halland instead of executing him. Both sources agree that all Norwegians noted Hakon's outstanding performance during the battle and that Haraldr was envious. If Sturluson correctly assesses the situation in the *Heimskringla*, then Haraldr was even more upset that he won a major battle against

²⁴Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, 60-62; *Morkinskinna*, 42.

Sveinn, but since he did not capture him he could not turn the victory into gaining control of Denmark.²⁵

In 1064, Haraldr and Sveinn made a peace agreement after 16 years of off-and-on raids and battles. As long as both kings lived, they agreed to pay no compensation to each other, keep the current boundaries, and exchange hostages. Haraldr could now turn his full attention internally, and Hakon became the next target of opportunity. The sources are not clear what led to the open conflict between Haraldr and Hakon. *King Harald's Saga* states that Uppland paid their taxes to Hakon instead of Haraldr, while the *Morkinskinna* states that Haraldr started to attack Sweden, and King Steinkell enticed Hakon to be one of his earls. Both chronicles agree that the battle took place in the summer of 1065 near Lake Vaner in Sweden (see Figure 8). Haraldr left Prince Magnus and some men to guard the ships, and marched inland until after coming to a hill, they saw Hakon's forces (*Morkinskinna* instead states that both sides formed on opposite sides of a valley). Haraldr had the advantage since he had the high ground and a higher number of men who were better equipped. However, Hakon had to defend his territory by removing Haraldr (plus demonstrate to his new subordinates that he was not afraid to fight), so he charged Haraldr. Although Hakon and his soldiers fought well, they were soon overcome and had to retreat. Haraldr captured King Magnus' battle standard (Hakon married Ragnhildr, King Magnus' daughter, who gave him the standard), giving him an emotional victory, but a lone soldier ambushed the standard-bearer and then headed off into the woods. Haraldr and his men made it back to the ships, and then sailed

²⁵Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, 63-68; *Morkinskinna*, 42.

back to Norway after breaking away from the ice. That winter according to King Harald's saga, Haraldr raided Romerike, Heidmark, and Hadaland, and this time the north submitted to his rule (see Figure 10).²⁶ At this time, Haraldr had peace inside Norway and with his neighbors Denmark and Sweden, leaving open opportunities to strike elsewhere.

King Haraldr had risen from being the homeless brother of a defeated king to king in his own right, and earned a reputation as a warrior during his military adventures in Kiev, Constantinople, and against Denmark and Sweden. His range of military experiences included raids, sieges, and set-piece battles. He also showed a ruthlessness in politics, using opportunities to take advantage of the northern political families and increase his wealth and influence at the expense of theirs.

Duke William of Normandy's Military and Political Background

William spent most of his time besieging castles and leading raids up until his invasion of England in 1066. He began his reign of Normandy as a child, and relied on his guardians to control his military forces and prevent other factions from overtaking his position as duke. After coming of age and ruling in his own right, he still had the problem of rebellions and ever-changing alliances. Between 1047 and 1060, neighboring dukes, counts, and even the king would turn William's vassals against him, forcing William to build castles to protect his territory (which he would also do once he landed in England) and tear down those of the rebels. However, William made one alliance that would reap great rewards. William married Matilda to cement an alliance with Count

²⁶ Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, 71-72; *Morkinskinna*, 43.

Baldwin of Flanders, giving him a powerful neighbor. In 1060, Count Baldwin became the regent to young King Philip, improving relations between Normandy and France. This allowed William to turn on his neighbors, and took over Maine in 1063. In 1064, Harold Godwineson landed in Normandy to presumably to try to get back his brother and nephew who were still hostages in Normandy since 1051-2 Godwine exile. Harold left with only his nephew, and he supposedly promised to support William's succession of King Edward to the English throne. By 1066, William's political situation was stable enough for him to attack Harold in England without worrying that his dukedom itself would be attacked.

Like Harold, William's political and military affairs were confined to fighting direct threats to his own area of political responsibility, and mostly consisted of raids and counter-raids rather than set-piece battles. William was the son of Duke Robert of Normandy and his concubine Herleva (daughter of Robert's chamberlain). In 1035, before he went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Duke Robert of Normandy announced that his only son William would lead the duchy in his place and be its military leader (although at this time, William was only seven or eight years old), and appointed Count Alan III of Brittany, Count Gilbert of Brionne, and Osbern the Steward as his guardians. Duke Robert died on the journey, setting up a minority that other Norman magnates could use to exploit and set up a new political dynasty. Many Normans fortified their locations and then launched raids on surrounding areas.

The years of civil war in Normandy resulted in the deaths of Count Gilbert, Hugh I of Montfort and Walkelin of Ferrières in battle and the assassinations of Osbern and William's tutor Turolde. Another source of contention was Roger of Tosny, a descendant

of Duke Richard of Normandy, who represented the faction of nobles who did not want to have a bastard rule over them and probably wanted Normandy for himself.

Fortunately for William, the loyal Roger of Beaumont killed Roger and his sons in a battle that took place in 1040. With the advice of his counselors, William chose Rodulf of Gacé as his guardian and military leader for his loyal magnates, while the others looked for the aid of King Henry of France to attack the Normandy borders. One of the targets included the strategically important castle at Tillières (for locations in Normandy, see Figure 11), which Rodulf burned down, rebuilt, and then garrisoned with his own men. In 1043, Thurstan Goz, vicomte of Hiémois, rebelled against Duke William, but Rodulf led the army against him and successfully besieged Thurstan's castle. Duke William sent him into exile, which he would do to other rebellious Norman magnates that he defeated.²⁷ William survived his minority with the aid of his guardians, and they must have taught him that he needed to eliminate political rivals by attacking their power bases. William would do when he invaded southern England in 1066, which still fell under Harold's control as Earl of Wessex in addition to his position as King of England.

William then set up an alliance with King Henry, who presented William with the arms of a knight, representing a ceremony that Chibnall believes to indicate that he had come of age to rule in his own right. With Henry's support, he suppressed the rebellion of Guy, son of Count Reginald of Burgundy and Adzelia (daughter of Duke Richard II of Normandy) at the battle of Val-ès-Dunes in 1047, which was more of an ambush than a set-piece battle. Afterwards, he pursued Guy to his fortification at Brionne, where he

²⁷William of Jumièges and Orderic Vitalis, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, ed. Chibnall, 6.11 (12), 7.1.3 (6).

successfully besieged them; Chibnall believes it lasted until 1049. Once the food ran out, Guy asked for mercy and received it, then left for (or more likely was exiled to) Burgundy. To prevent the need for further long sieges to defeat a rebelling noble, William had the Normans who allied with Guy tear down all their new fortifications.

Returning the aid he received at Val-ès-Dunes, William joined Henry on his campaigns against Geoffrey Martel of Anjou, although Henry would break their alliance and support attacks on Normandy when it appeared too powerful. William of Poitiers records a story of Duke William's personal combat skill during this campaign, summarized as follows: Duke William and four of his companions had a chance encounter with 15 men of Geoffrey's forces. William threw his lance at "the boldest of them," breaking his thigh. He then pursued the others, and by the time the rest of his contingent of 300 men found him, he alone had captured seven more men.²⁸

During the next phase of Duke William's rule, he improved relations with a powerful neighbor while trying to suppress another Norman magnate. During a lull in the fighting, negotiations opened between Count Baldwin of Flanders and Duke William of Normandy to marry Baldwin's daughter Matilda, which would improve relations with one of his strong neighbors. According to Chibnall, the following events took place either in 1048-9 or 1051-2, but the sources do not indicate an exact date and William of Jumièges and William of Poitiers present the information in different orders. Meanwhile, Geoffrey Martel took over a strategic fortification in Normandy at Alençon. Along the way to retake the castle, William started besieging Geoffrey's castle at Domfront. William set

²⁸William of Jumièges, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, 7.9(21); William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, ed. Chibnall, 1.7-1.11, 1.13.

up ambushes for castle foraging parties, led attacks on the castle, and even built four siege-castles around it. Geoffrey sent a relief force, but it avoided a pitched battle with William, who then proceeded to Alençon and successfully entered it. After hearing of his taking over Alençon, the people of Domfront surrendered to William.

After this siege, Duke William had to suppress the rebellion of William of Arques, another noble plundering and pillaging the countryside. According to William of Jumièges, William of Arques had the support of King Henry, possibly because Duke William was becoming too powerful. Duke William led an army to the castle at Arques and started a siege. William of Poitiers also mentions how a lone Duke William had met the rebels on a hill outside the castle and personally chased them into the castle, and would have killed many of them if they had not reached the safety of the castle gates. King Henry, upon hearing of William's arrival, brought a force of men to relieve the siege and attacked the duke's siege-castle. However, the king could not make any progress, so he provided the castle with reinforcements and provisions (this is an interpretation of William of Poitiers' phrase that he "alleviated with his money the poverty of those he had come to help") and left the area. Further requests from the castle to Henry for support went unanswered, so William of Arques surrendered the castle. However, the king and the leaders of surrounding territories continued to attack William.²⁹

Duke William's conflict with King Henry continued. In 1054, King Henry led a two-pronged attack into Normandy, raising forces from across France. The king advanced his

²⁹William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 1.15-19, 1.23-28; William of Jumièges, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, 2.102-3.

army to Rouen from the region of Évreux. The king commanded the forces assembled between the Seine and the Garonne rivers in addition to the men of Aquitaine, while his brother Odo and the royal chamberlain Reginald controlled the men gathered between the Seine and the Rhine. Duke William surprised Odo and Reginald in an attack, which led to their army's collapse and defeat. William sent a herald to give the news to King Henry, who then decided to withdraw his men. After this battle, William and Henry made peace, allowing William to build a castle at Ambrières that he could use as a base for attacks on Maine. Orderic Vitalis adds that he built the fortification of Breteuil (controlled by William fitz Osbern) across from that of King Henry's Tillières, establishing a border there between Normandy and France. Geoffrey Martel attacked the castle to try to destroy it, but William's relief force arrived and dispersed them.

In 1057, King Henry again broke his alliance with William and joined Geoffrey Martel to raid Normandy. While at Dives, Duke William attacked after half the army had crossed the river with the king, resulting in the Battle of Varaville. Since the tide was too high to cross, William did not pursue the king and the remainder of his force, who left Normandy.³⁰ Between the years 1047-1057, William fought a few battles, conducted several sieges, and dealt with many shifting alliances and rebellions. However, his marriage to Matilda improved relations with Flanders and other events would occur that would help Normandy's political stability.

Duke William's enemies King Henry and Geoffrey Martel died in 1060, leaving a path open to make peace between Normandy and France and allowing William to launch

³⁰Orderic Vitalis, *Gesta Normannum Ducum*, 7.(25).; William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 1.29-34.

raids on his neighbors. Duke William's father-in-law, Count Baldwin of Flanders, became King Philip's regent, improving relations between Normandy and France. Since William did not have to protect his province from raids, he turned his attention towards Maine. In 1062, Count Herbert II Bacon died, and Count Walter III of Mantes took over Maine province. William of Poitiers describes Duke William's tactics and their effects during his campaign in 1063:

To strike fear into the settlement by frequent, lengthy expeditions in that territory, to lay waste the vines, fields, and domains, to capture fortified places all around and put garrisons in them wherever it was desirable; finally to attack the region relentlessly with a great multitude of troubles. It is easier to imagine than to relate how, when they saw these things being done, the people of Maine became anxious and fearful, and how they wished to free their necks from this heavy burden...they often threatened battle but never dared to do so...[the people of Maine] finally vanquished, when the castles throughout the whole county have fallen...³¹

Most likely, the inhabitants of the Hastings peninsula would feel the same way three years later. The next magnate William fought was his earlier nemesis from Ambrières, Geoffrey of Mayenne. William captured the city of Le Mans and forced Geoffrey to flee, but William decided to capture his fortification at Mayenne, then pursued him. The castle was difficult to siege since it was situated on a high rock overlooking the Mayenne River and its terrain was unsuitable for siege weaponry, but William told his men to throw in fire. The fire caught on the buildings, causing the defenders to abandon their posts, and soon William's soldiers broke into the castle. He and his army repaired the damage from the fire and garrisoned the castle with his men. With another magnate humbled, William consolidated his control of Normandy.

³¹William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 1.35-38.

In 1064, Harold visited Duke William. William of Poitiers gives the most details on a meeting between Duke William and Earl Harold Godwineson in the summer of 1064, so unsurprisingly it depicts Harold as someone who promised to support William's succession to the English crown. The chronicler Eadmer recorded that Harold hoped to secure the return of his brother Wulfnoð, and nephew Hakon, son of his dead older brother Sewegn, but according to William of Poitiers, it was to re-affirm William's status as King Edward the Confessor's heir. Harold landed in Ponthieu and was taken to Count Guy, but Duke William forced Count Guy to release him. Harold offered himself as a vassal to Duke William, and promised to fortify the castle of Dover and other places chosen by the duke, knowing that King Edward was ill and would not last much longer. Since Harold had sworn his support on holy relics, William used Harold's breaking of his promise as propaganda for his invasion in 1066. Duke William then outfitted Harold and his men and they went on a campaign to Breton to fight Conan II. Additionally, William had a castle built at Saint James to help protect the area from Conan's raids. Their first task was to relieve the siege of Ruallon of Dol, who had rebelled from Conan. Conan fled from the siege and allied with Geoffrey le Barbu (count of Anjou since 1060), and continued raiding the area and avoided a battle with William before they both left the area. Afterwards, William and his forces returned to Normandy. Harold returned to England with Hakon, but William must not have trusted him completely because Wulfnoð remained a hostage.³²

³² William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 1.41-46; Eadmer, *Eadmeri Historia Novorum in Anglia*, ed. M. Rule (RS, n.p., 1884), 5-6.

Until 1066, William spent his time either protecting Normandy from raids or invasions or launching raids on his neighbors. Besides the battle at Val-ès-Dunes (which was a small battle), William did not fight any other set-piece battles. Instead, he conducted several sieges and built castles to protect his territories, launch raids on his enemies, or at least present a visible deterrent to those wanting to raid an area. He did not fight any naval battles, which makes his commitment to build a fleet to attack King Harold all the more impressive.

The Succession Dispute

As historian R. Allen Brown noted, “the early Middle Ages were a period of personal government, *par excellence*, and politics, with such immense power concentrated in the hands of so few people, were largely a matter of personal relations.”³³ This point of view makes it understandable why powerful magnates would initiate wars over succession or expansion. King Edward’s first choice to succeed him was Prince Edward the Exile, son of King Edmund Ironside (half-brother of King Edward), recalled to England from Hungary in 1057, but he died shortly upon arrival.³⁴ There were still no heirs at the time Edward died, allowing a number of claimants to the throne including Duke William of Normandy, Earl Harold of Wessex, King Sveinn Estriðson of Denmark, and King Haraldr Harðráði of Norway.

Duke William’s succession almost faltered at the beginning since he was only seven years old and a bastard (Robert I had declared him his heir before his fatal pilgrimage), but he learned how to control and exploit his magnates as he consolidated his dukedom,

³³R. Allen Brown, *The Normans and the Norman Conquest*, 48.

³⁴*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Versions C, D, and E, 1057.

and then placed his companions, brothers, and friends into secular and spiritual positions of power.³⁵ According to William of Poitiers, Edward the Confessor had named William his heir and sent Robert, Archbishop of Canterbury and Harold, as delegates to notify William of this honor and pledge it with oaths (see Figure 12).³⁶ During this time, Orderic Vitalis notes that Harold joined William on a campaign against the Bretons and solidified their relationship, but William kept Harold's brother Wulfnoð as hostage when Harold returned to England.³⁷ William of Poitiers uses Harold's perjury as the primary motivator for Duke William to attack England, recovering the crown he thought rightfully his.³⁸

Historian Simon Keynes, using evidence from charters and Norman chronicles, elaborates on the reasons why King Edward would offer the crown to his cousin William. When Knútr took the English crown in 1016 and married the former king Æthelred's wife Emma (Duke Richard I of Normandy's daughter), the æthelings Alfred and Edward fled to the Norman court. In 1033, Duke Robert initiated an expedition against King Knútr in England on behalf of Alfred and Edward that failed, although William of Poitiers considered it a successful raid by Edward on Harold. Alfred led a raid against King Harold Harefoot in 1036 (King Knútr died in 1035), but was captured by Earl Godwine, turned over to King Harold, and killed (although Queen Emma's apologists claim that King Harold invited him in and then had him deviously murdered). The Normans treated

³⁵R. Allen Brown, *The Normans and the Norman Conquest*, 29-31.

³⁶William of Jumièges, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, 7.13.

³⁷Orderic Vitalis, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, 8.31.

Edward as the sole heir and expatriate king (and he signed charters as such), so Edward had established strong ties with the Norman dukes, including William before his return to England in 1041. With this view, it is not surprising that a childless Edward would name Duke William his heir for the sanctuary given to him during exile and the invasions of England led on the æthelings' behalf.³⁹ The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle mentions his preference for Normans: in 1051, Eustace of Boulogne and his companions caused a violent conflict in Dover, so King Edward sent Earl Godwine to ravage the city. Godwine refused to attack a place in his own earldom because of a foreigner and sided with the city, resulting in his and his family's exile.⁴⁰

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle gives an alternate history and never mentions any trips to Normandy to name Duke William heir, and states that Harold became King because Edward picked him and he was elected by the *witenagemot*.⁴¹ The *Life of King Edward* gives more detail of his deathbed wish, "And stretching forth his hand to...Harold, he said, 'I commend...all the kingdom to your protection.'⁴²" Another English claimant was the 12-year-old ætheling Edgar, son of Edward the Exile and grandson of Edmund Ironside (King Edward's older brother), who had the strength of hundreds of years of tradition picking the ætheling. However, the ranking nobles and King Edward must have

³⁸ William of Jumièges, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, 7.13.

³⁹ Simon Keynes, "The Aethelings in Normandy," 176, 194-6, 198; William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 1.2.

⁴⁰ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Versions D, E, 1051.

⁴¹ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version E, 1066.

⁴² "The Life of King Edward," 2.123.

decided not to put England's fate in his hands, possibly expecting other kings to take advantage of the minority.⁴³

The Scandinavians also had their representatives for the succession dispute. Denmark's King Sveinn Estriðson, nephew of Knútr and grandson of King Sveinn "Forkbeard" Haroldsson, also had a slight claim for the throne and only mistrust of Norway's King Haraldr prevented him from attempting to push for the crown.⁴⁴ King Sveinn's brothers and sons invaded England in 1069 and King Sveinn himself led one in 1070, but all three attempts failed.⁴⁵ King Haraldr Harðráði of Norway did not need a claim, but an opportunity, which occurred when Harold's exiled brother Tostig convinced King Haraldr that it would be in their best interests to band together and take over England (Tostig had earlier approached Duke William and King Sveinn to get their military support, but both refused).⁴⁶ Although the Norse Kings' sagas and the Anglo-Saxon chronicles conflict on what agreement they made, Haraldr had more military experience than either Harold or William, and had an English ally to help him in the endeavor. At the same time, Tostig finally had a significant military force with him to regain his earldom, and maybe rule England for Haraldr Harðráði if he decided to stay in Norway.

England chose Harold Godwineson as king. Since neither Wales nor Scotland attempted raids into England at this time, the political situation must have been stable.

⁴³Gravett, *Hastings 1066*, 12.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version E, 1069-70.

⁴⁶DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 233-4, 239.

This did not deter two other rulers from taking their chance. Duke William must have felt betrayed by Harold's accession to the throne of England, enough to invade England though his chance of success was thin. Meanwhile, King Haraldr of Norway saw an opportunity to take over England as the Danish king Knútr had. Only the campaigns of 1066 would tell which ruler would win in the end.

CHAPTER 3

BATTLES OF FULFORD GATE AND STAMFORD BRIDGE

The first major invasion of 1066 did not come from Normandy, where Harold had most expected it, but from Norway. Tostig, former earl of Northumbria and brother of the king, and King Haraldr Harðráði of Norway allied to take the English crown away from Harold Godwineson. Their campaign resulted in two raids and two battles, designed to test England's military capacity and draw the northern earls out of York. After their victory over the northern earls Edwin and Morcar, Haraldr and Tostig assumed the Anglo-Scandinavian Danelaw would support them in their march to conquer the remainder of England. However, they still had to contend with Harold and his military strategy.

Tostig Seeks Support Outside England to Regain Power

After Harold became King of England, Tostig may have hoped that he would receive the earldom of Northumbria back. He did not commit any crimes as bad as his brother Swegen's, who abducted an abbess in 1046 and murdered Earl Beorn in 1049. Furthermore, he had proven himself a successful military commander in his expeditions against the Welsh and the Scottish and a competent politician with his alliance with King Malcom III of Scotland. However, Harold's marriage to Ealdyð, Earls Edwin and Morcar's sister, and his visit to Northumbria to encourage that province's support for his

kingship, suggested he would not recall Tostig from exile in Flanders.¹ Tostig would have to seek help from foreign countries to restore his power in England.

Chronicles point out five different nations that Tostig would try to get support from: Normandy, Flanders, Denmark, Norway, and Scotland. Orderic Vitalis recounts a visit Tostig made to Duke William of Normandy. However, considering the Normans' tradition of conflict with the Godwine family, including William's future mistreatment of his hostage Wulfnoð (the youngest Godwineson), it is doubtful that the meeting occurred. Even if it had, Duke William did not seem to give much military assistance to Tostig, and he would have been more concerned about his own preparations to invade England.

The Norse kings sagas describe Tostig's visit to Denmark to get aid from King Sveinn Estríðson, who had earlier harbored the eldest Godwine son Swegen after his banishment from England. Historian Magnus Magnusson points out that Sveinn's father, Earl Ulf, was the brother to Tostig's mother, Gyða, making them first cousins, presenting an opportunity for Tostig to appeal to Sveinn using kinship ties. Sveinn offered Tostig an earldom in Denmark, but Tostig would only accept a force for an attack on England. Sveinn had several good reasons for not giving military aid to Tostig. The wars with King Haraldr of Norway between 1048 and 1064 weakened Denmark militarily and economically, and Sveinn could not afford to give Tostig help on a high-risk campaign. Additionally, the army and fleet units that left with Tostig would diminish his defense against Haraldr, who might take the opportunity to attack. The final reason comes in light of Sveinn's future actions. He most likely knew others would invade England, so he

¹*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version C, 1046; Version C, D, and E, 1049; DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 230.

would wait until later to attack (he sponsored an attack against William in 1069 and led another in 1070). Ultimately, Tostig and Sveinn could not agree on the conditions for an alliance, resulting in ill feelings and Tostig's departure to find help elsewhere.²

Tostig finally obtained the support he wanted from King Haraldr Harðráði of Norway. There is no consensus among the chronicles about when and where Tostig and King Haraldr met and formed their partnership. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Version C, Tostig spent the summer in Scotland, meeting King Haraldr at the Tyne River as they had "previously agreed." DeVries suggests that if this story is correct, then the intention was to stir the Viking spirit, since this location was the scene of successful monastery raids at Wearmouth and Jarrow in the ninth century. The D and E Versions of the *Chronicle* state instead that Haraldr and Tostig met in Scotland, where Tostig gave his allegiance, and then they sailed to the Humber River. Since King Malcom seemed to be an ally of both Haraldr and Tostig and Scotland was a secure base on the island but outside of England, the meeting in Scotland seems more likely.

Other chronicles place Tostig and Haraldr's meeting earlier, although they do not indicate where the meeting took place. According to the *Ágrip* and Theodoricus, Tostig offered his services as an intermediary to the English magnates in trade for Haraldr's military support, promising that after defeating Harold, they could divide England

²Magnus Magnusson, ed, *King Haraldr's Saga*, 135; Orderic Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*, II:138-145, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall, 6 vols (Oxford, 1969-1980), cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 232-3; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Versions D and E, 1069, 1070; *Fagrskinna: Kortfattet Norsk Konge-Saga*, ed. P.A. Munch and C.R. Unger (Oslo, n.p. 1847), 134, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 234; *Flateyjarbók: En samling af Norske Konge-Sagaer*, ed. G. Vigfusson and C.R. Unger, 3 vols, (Oslo, n.p., 1860-8) III:387, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 234; Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, 78; *Morkinskinna, Pergamentsbog fra første halvdel af det trettende aarhundrede*, ed C.R. Unger (Oslo, n.p. 1867), 110, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 234.

between them;³ and presumably the Danelaw would go to one magnate and the remainder of England would go to the other. The sources do not indicate whether Tostig's half would have been the Danelaw because of his former position as earl of Northumbria or would have been the traditional Godwine family earldoms of southern England. The Norse kings' sagas add that the king and exiled earl met in Norway, and *King Harald's Saga* gives the following account of Tostig convincing Haraldr not to miss a great opportunity:

Everyone knows that there has never been born in Scandinavia a warrior to compare with you; and it seems to me very strange that you should spend fifteen years trying to conquer Denmark, and yet be so reluctant to have England when it is yours for the taking. King Harald thought carefully over what the earl had said, the same time he had a great desire to win this kingdom.⁴

Morkinskinna gives a different version, saying that Tostig reminded Haraldr of a pact between Harðaknútr and King Magnus, in which England would go to Magnus if Harðaknútr died childless. However, Magnus did not want to interfere with King Edward's succession, and the next logical step would be that since Edward died childless and Haraldr succeeded Magnus, that the English crown should now go to Haraldr. The *Morkinskinna* also adds another alternative version of events, saying that Tostig asked Haraldr's nephew to convince Haraldr to undertake a campaign to the west, while Tostig tried to convince the Normans to help him.

³*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version C, D, and E, 1066; *Ágrip of Nóregs konunga sögum*, ed F. Jónsson (Halle, n.p., 1929), 41, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 236; Theodoricus, *Monumentahistorica Norvegiæ: Lainske kildekrifter til Norges historeie I middelalderen*, ed. E. Wessén (Oslo, n.p., 1880), 56, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 236.

⁴*Morkinskinna*, 49; Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, 79.

The sources state that Tostig offered Northumbria to Haraldr, but this story seems unlikely since Tostig was no longer earl there. Geoffrey Gaimar adds another detail that adds support to a Tostig and Haraldr meeting in Norway before their joint invasion. Copsig, possibly the same one who Symeon of Durham reports presided over the affairs of Northumbria under Tostig, left the Orkney Islands with 17 ships to join Tostig on his initial 1066 raid, and at that time the Orkney Islands were owned by Norway. As historian Frank Stenton has noted, this indicates some agreement between Haraldr and Tostig, since not even a small force could leave the Orkney Islands without Haraldr's approval. DeVries agrees and believes that Norway is the most likely place for a meeting between King Haraldr and the exiled Tostig.⁵

Modern historians have different interpretations of these primary sources. N.J. Higham believes that Tostig allied with Haraldr as a last resort after his initial raid into England failed to place him back into power, meeting in Scotland as mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. However, Kelly DeVries more convincingly argues that based upon the Norse Sagas, Tostig and Haraldr met in Norway before their joint invasion since the English sources do not normally record events that happen outside of England and the reliable chronicler Orderic Vitalis also gives a description of the meeting.⁶

⁵ *Morkinskinna*, 49; Geoffrey Gaimar, *Lestoire des Engles*, ed. T.D. Hardy and C.T. Martin, 2 vols. Rolls Series (London, n.p. 1888-9), I:219, as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 239-240; Symeon of Durham, *Libellvs De Exordio Atqve Procursv Istivs, Hoc Est Dvnhelmensis, Ecclesie: Tract on the Origins and Progress of this the Church of Durham*, ed. and trans. David Rollason, Oxford Medieval Text Series, ed. J.W. Binns, B.F. Harvey, M. Lapidge, and T. Reuter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 3.13; F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, n.p., 1971), 587, as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 240; DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 240.

⁶ N.J. Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, 190; DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 238-40.

The most likely series of events is that Tostig met Haraldr in Norway to make an alliance. Tostig's best chance to convince Haraldr to invade England was to appeal to him in person at court, and since Sveinn refused to help, the path opened to talk to Sveinn's former opponent. Additionally, Tostig would be the best source of information on England and its army, so that they could develop a plan to invade. During this meeting they set up a scenario where Tostig would raid southern England to check the defenses and gather more manpower and supplies, then meet with Haraldr in Scotland to make a joint invasion into northern England.

Campaigns in Early 1066

The *King Harald's Saga* reports that Haraldr and Tostig met often and they planned to attack England in the late summer, and then Tostig went to Flanders to gather the English and Flemish troops that gathered under his banner before heading to the Isle of Wight (see Figure 13). While Tostig went on his raid, Haraldr prepared an army and fleet to cross the English Channel. According to Sturluson, the Norwegians respected the English professional fighters, "England would be very hard to conquer...the warriors who were known as the king's housecarls were so valiant that any one of them was worth two of the best men in King Harald's army." The fleet included from an estimated 200 to 500-plus ships. DeVries makes a good point that the Norse sources, which are on the lower end of the estimation, may only include ships from Norway, while the English sources may include ships added from the Orkney Islands and Scotland. *King Harald's Saga* also mentions that it did not include supply ships and small ships in its total. On these ships, Miles W. Campbell has estimated 11,000 to 12,000 men (44-48 men on 250 ships, modeled after the unearthed Gokstad and Oseberg Viking ships), while F.W.

Brooks has estimated up to 18,000 men. Sturluson notes that Haraldr raised a half-levy, most likely meaning half the available number of men would go on an expedition while the remaining would defend against invasion in his absence.⁷

In the initial phase of Tostig's raid in May or June, he went to the Isle of Wight and raided villages along the coast. Although the sources give no reasons for this strategy, there are several guesses as to what Tostig tried to accomplish. First, this could be interpreted as a personal attack on Harold since he kept his position as Earl of Wessex while King of England. DeVries adds two other possible explanations. Godwine and his sons started their raids here 14 years earlier to gather strength and restore their positions in England, and Tostig may have tried to achieve the same thing. It could also have been a part of Haraldr and Tostig's overall strategy to draw attention away from the north and reconnoiter the strength of Earls Edwin and Morcar.⁸ At the very least, Tostig could pick up additional men, ships, and provisions that he would need for the invasion.

Tostig then sailed to Sandwich, a major port in Southwest England, to conduct more raids and to raise more forces. Tostig may have had friends here to aid him in his cause, or he thought a major port would be a good place to hire mercenaries. In response, King Harold "gathered greater naval and land hosts than any king in this country had ever gathered before."⁹ King Harold then set off to Sandwich, but by this time Tostig set sail

⁷ Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, 79, 80; *Fagrskinna*, 21, 135, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 240; *Morkinskinna*, 49; *Flateyjarbók*, III:335, 390, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 240; Miles W. Campbell, "An Inquiry into the Troop Strength of King Harald Hardrada's Invasion Fleet of 1066," *American Neptune* 44 (1984): 96-102, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 241-2; F.W. Brooks, *The Battle of Stamford Bridge* (York: East Yorkshire Local History Society, 1956), 10.

⁸ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version C, D, and E, 1066; DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 247.

⁹ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version D, 1066.

for Mercia along with his new shipmen, and “some went willing, others unwillingly.”¹⁰⁶⁶

The legitimate warlord commonly impressed ships in time of conflict since standing warships were rare at this time¹¹, but forcing men into ship duty may have occurred with even merchant ships needing additional manpower. Tostig then sailed north with 60 ships into Lindsey, where Earls Edwin and Morcar fought him with land levies and repelled him. Tostig’s forces decreased to twelve ships, and he sailed to Scotland to join with King Haraldr's military forces.¹²

Harold did not follow his brother into northern England. He and a small contingent of forces went to Sandwich and waited for the mustering of more forces. Afterwards, he sailed to the Isle of Wight and stationed levies to watch the southern coast. He guessed correctly that Tostig’s raid foreshadowed an invasion, but he expected it from Normandy or saw the Normans as a greater threat. He ran out of supplies on 8 September, and decided to disband his forces. Unfortunately, many of his ships sank on their way back to London.¹³

Stamford Bridge Campaigns

Ironically, the winds keeping Duke William from crossing the English Channel from Dives were the same ones that carried King Haraldr to Scotland and England. The Sagas say that King Haraldr left Magnus in charge of Norway and took his son Olaf with him. He sailed in August to the Shetland Islands, and then landed on the Orkney Islands. He

¹⁰*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version C, 1066.

¹¹Felipe Fernández -Armesto, “Naval Warfare After the Viking Age, c. 1100-1500,” in *Medieval Warfare, A History*, ed. Maurice Keen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 234.

¹²*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version C, D, and E, 1066.

brought his wife Elisabeth, his daughter Maria and according to the King Haraldr's saga his other daughter Ingigerðr, possibly intending to winter there if they did not defeat Harold by the campaign season's end or determined it would be the safest place to keep his family. Once in the Orkney Islands, Earls Páll and Erlandr Þorfinn ("Þ" is pronounced "th") joined the expedition. They sailed to Dumferline in Scotland to get more supplies and to meet up with Tostig.

Haraldr's raided Cleveland's coast to plunder and gather supplies while spreading terror to the surrounding area, which parallel his ones in Denmark (see Figure 14). Haraldr and Tostig first attacked Scarborough, whose inhabitants put up a good defense. Next, the army marched overland down to the Humber River and took over Holderness according to the *King Harald's Saga* and the *Orkneyinga Saga*. At the Humber River, they re-boarded the fleet, sailed to the Ouse River, and then disembarked at Ricall (only John of Worcester and Symeon of Durham identify Ricall as the disembarking point).¹⁴ DeVries suggests that an Anglo-Saxon naval levy would have blocked the Norwegian escape route if they sailed any closer to York, based upon E.A. Freeman's reading of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version C, which mentions that Harold added the "lið fylcade" (usually referred to naval levies and not land levies) to his forces when he reached

¹³ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version C, D, and E, 1066.

¹⁴ Brown, *The Normans and the Norman Conquest*, 134; *Fagrskinna*, 135-6, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 250-4; *Morkinskinna*, 49; Sturlson, *King Harold's Saga*, 83-4; *Flateyjarbók*, III:390, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 250-4; John of Worcester, *Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 1066. Symeon of Durham, *Historia regum*, ed. T. Arnold. 2 vols. Rolls Series (London, n.p. 1882-5), II:180, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 254-5; DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 254-5, *Orkneyinga Saga: The History of the Earls of Orkney*, eds. and trans. Herman Pállson and Paul Edwards (Hogarth Press Ltd, 1978; New York: Penguin, 1981), 34.

Tadcaster.¹⁵ Earls Edwin and Morcar learned of the invasion, gathered as large a force as possible, and then went to York. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* states that on 20 September, they left York to march towards the Norwegian invaders. At a location two miles south of York, identified by Symeon of Durham as the northern shore of the Ouse River at Fulford, the armies met.¹⁶

The Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman sources state that once King Harold learned of King Haraldr's invasion, he gathered his forces to march north. If this was the case, and Edwin and Morcar knew Harold was coming, then why did they leave a fortified city of York to attack King Haraldr's forces? Kelly DeVries suggests that the desperate earls decided that if the inhabitants of Scarborough put up an excellent struggle against the Norwegians, then their army could do better. The Norwegian setup for battle may have induced them to attack, since it appears that King Haraldr left his right flank weak and the English earls could not walk away from the opportunity. Furthermore, Harold biographer Ian Walker believes that the earls decided to stop the Norwegians at the site, blocking the road and the river (Morcar owned the Fulford estate) and preventing the Norwegians from taking York unopposed and undermining Northumbrian morale.¹⁷ However, these views do not adequately explain why the northern earls rushed out to fight the Norwegians, especially if they expected Harold to arrive within the week. York was a fortified city (unlike Scarborough) and could easily hold out for a week against an

¹⁵E.A Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest*, 5 vols, 2d ed (Oxford 1869-75) cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 254; DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 254-5.

¹⁶Symeon of Durham, *Historia regum*, II:180, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 254-5; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version C,D, and E 1066.

¹⁷DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 259; Walker, *Harold*, 157.

invading force that had no siege weaponry. One answer lies in the fact that they were warlords who had to demonstrate their ability to rule by winning in battle. DeVries' theme in *The Norwegian Invasion* is that the battles in 1066 resulted from the actions of warlords who used violence to gain power, land, wealth, and legitimacy to rule:

...they could not guarantee their own security among their numerous lords and nobles who were suspicious of their political ascension without showing these same individuals military victory. Once victory was achieved, these warlords could rest in the assurance that for someone to try and remove them from their throne, he would have to defeat an experienced and victorious general. How better to ally with him and thereby profit from that general's military legitimacy, than to attack him and risk the wrath and might of those who have been wise enough to attach themselves to his entourage, to become his companion and not his enemy.¹⁸

Although DeVries specifically refers to Harold, Haraldr, and William in the above quotation, he also uses it as a theme for other warlords. To demonstrate worthiness to obtain and maintain a leadership position, a warlord had to have a positive military reputation, using violence to subdue opponents, to protect their territories, and to deter attacks against them. DeVries uses the Godwine family as the case study; King Edward chose earls from the Godwine family because Swegen, Harold, and Tostig successfully protected the Welsh border and Tostig secured Scotland's frontier. The reverse was also true; Edward dismissed his Norman earls since they could not prevent the Godwine family raids in 1052.¹⁹

In the same manner, Morcar had to prove his worthiness as an earl by protecting Northumbria from invasion. Several facts support this hypothesis. He and Edwin had defeated Tostig earlier in Lindsey, and after hearing about Scarborough's impressive

¹⁸DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 2.

¹⁹DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 88, 102, 109-110, 173-7.

defense, they had confidence they could do it again. As modern historian N.J. Higham noted, Tostig's presence not only prompted the earls to attack, but York would have closed its doors to Haraldr since they cast their lot with Edwin and Morcar (demonstrating Harold's choice to side with the earls against his brother proved the correct since York may have invited Haraldr in like they had King Sveinn Forkbeard of Denmark earlier in the eleventh century if the unpopular Tostig remain in power).²⁰ Third, the chronicles do not mention what earls Edwin and Morcar were doing in the north while Harold was in the south watching the coast and preparing for his invasion. The most plausible explanation is that they were preparing for an attack, which is how the earls could gather their forces and march against Haraldr and Tostig within such a short amount of time. Finally, Morcar's responsibility to protect Northumbria helps to clarify why Harold did not pursue his brother after he left Sandwich.

The Battle of Fulford Gate

No archaeological information exists on this battlefield, since the estimated location is now in a developed suburban area of York, and the chronicles do not give detailed information on the terrain. There is no way to determine the number of forces that Edwin and Morcar raised, but military historian Christopher Gravett, believes that each side probably had 5,000 to 6,000 men. Miles Campbell's estimate of 11,000 for the Haraldr's forces are a total strength; some of the men were not combatants and a contingent had to guard the ships at Ricall, so an estimate of 8,000 to 9,000 seems more likely for the Norwegians. Symeon of Durham states that the Ouse River was the battlefield's southern end and the kings' sagas mention a dike and swamp on the other side (see Figure 15).

²⁰N.J. Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, 194-5.

Symeon and the sagas share the detail that a road ran through the battlefield. Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman sources state that Edwin (although the sagas state that Earl Waltheof of Huntingdon was Edwin) and Morcar selected the site for battle, while the Norse Kings sagas indicate the Norwegians intercepted the English on their way to attack the fleet at Ricall. According to the sagas, King Haraldr formed up his forces in a solid line, with most of his forces on the left flank against the river and his “untrustworthy” troops on the right flank next to the dike, and DeVries suggests that these were Tostig and men under his command. The Norwegian formation would have protected his left flank from folding, but weakened his right flank. None of the chronicles describe Edwin and Morcar’s tactical strategy. Edwin was on the English right flank and Morcar faced Tostig. DeVries theorizes that Haraldr developed this set up to break up the Anglo-Saxon shield wall since they would charge to attack a vulnerable right flank. Having Morcar lined up against Tostig made a charge more likely because he replaced Tostig as earl of Northumbria, and would have wanted to demonstrate military legitimacy besides a likely personal animosity.²¹

William of Malmesbury states that Morcar, remembering how easily he and Edwin had repelled Tostig in Lindsey earlier in the year, charged Tostig’s flank. The sagas then recount that the English, under Morcar’s standard, broke through the Norwegian right

²¹*Fagrskinna*, 136, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 255; *Morkinskinna*, 49; Sturlson, *King Harald’s Saga*, 84; *Flateyjarbók*, III:390, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 255; Gravett, *Hastings*, 43; Symeon of Durham, II:180, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 255; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version C, 1066; John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 1066; Symeon of Durham, II:180, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 256; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People*, ed. and trans. D. Greenway (Oxford, n.p., 1996), 386-7, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 256; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford, n.p., 1998), I:420-1, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 256; Geoffrey Gaimar, I:221, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 256; DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 255-6.

flank, and then pursued them. At this point, Haraldr charged Edwin and the English troops who did not leave with Morcar. Edwin's flank collapsed and many fled, making it easy for the Norwegians to kill many of the English, although John of Worcester claims that the English put up a valiant struggle before their defeat. Morcar and his contingent also retreated, and the sagas erroneously report Morcar was killed. The Norwegians may have killed everyone around Morcar's battle standard and thought he was among them dead since *Morkinskinna* reports, "Jarl Morkere fell, and together with him so many men that the pool was full of corpses where the fleeing men had congregated."²²

After the battle, the sagas report that Haraldr sent men to protect his ships at Ricall, while the remainder gathered at Stamford Bridge. Historian Magnus Magnusson points out that "the roads of eastern Yorkshire converged on the crossing of the Derwent, and was a strategic position from which to dominate the county while negotiating the capitulation of York."²³ The people of York sent a message to Haraldr saying they would surrender peacefully rather than undergo siege. Military historian John France notes that castles during the middle ages were powerless without a support network of other fortified locations or a defending field army, and since York had neither they would have put up a weak struggle against the Norwegians. DeVries suggests two good reasons why King Haraldr conducted friendly surrender terms with York. Most importantly, the Norwegians needed supplies and men for campaigning against Harold. Secondly, York was to be Tostig's capital after defeating Harold, and it did not make sense to destroy it.

²²William of Malmesbury, I:420-1, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 257; Sturlson, *King Harald's Saga*, 85; *Morkinskinna*, 49; John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 1066.

²³Sturlson, *King Harald's Saga*, 86; *Morkinskinna*, 49; Magnus Magnusson, ed., *King Harald's Saga*, 145.

Another possible reason was that he would not have the time to take the city by siege if he wanted to turn south for further campaigning.

On 24 September, both sides met just outside York and made an agreement to be fulfilled the following day at Stamford Bridge. John of Worcester stated that 150 of the town's leading men would act as hostages, while 150 of Haraldr and Tostig's men would do the same. Furthermore, the Norwegians did not execute Edwin, who was captured in York. DeVries astutely notes that Morcar would not have been as fortunate, Tostig would have probably executed him like his brother Sewegn murdered Beorn for the similar "crime" of taking over his earldom. The English may have told the Norwegians that Morcar was dead so they would not try to find and execute him. According to the *Morkinskinna*, *King Harald's Saga*, and the *Orkneyinga Saga*, Haraldr returned to his ships at Ricall instead of staying overnight at York. They did not know that on the same evening, King Harold had arrived in Tadcaster.²⁴

The sources are not consistent on when and where King Harold Godwineson learned about the Norwegian Invasion and the measures he took to take his forces north. The C Version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* does not give an exact date for when Harold learned of Haraldr and Tostig's invasion. It mentions that after dismissing his forces on 8 September, he arrived in London, heard of the invasion, marched north, and gathered levies along the way. The D and E Versions do not indicate when or where Harold learned of the invasion, but state that Harold learned of Edwin and Morcar's defeat and

²⁴*Fagrskinna*, 136, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 259-60; *Morkinskinna*, 49-50; Sturlson, *King Harald's Saga*, 86; *Flateyjarbók*, III:391, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 259-60; France, *Western Warfare*, 107; DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 260-1; John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 1066; *Orkneyinga Saga*, 34.

surprised the Norwegians with a great host. The C Version also mentions that Harold lined up his troops in battle formation when arriving at Tadcaster, expecting an attack from York, then left the following day for York. Instead of stopping there, he proceeded down to Stamford Bridge to fight so he would not give advance warning to the Norwegians that he was nearby. The C Version of the events seems most plausible; Harold gathered forces when he learned of the invasion, and then marched towards York when the invaders defeated his northern earls. According to the Sturluson, Harold marched into York, which had decided to change allegiance again, and spent the night, locking the doors to keep the information that Harold was there from the Norwegians.²⁵ The Anglo-Saxon sources make more sense in this instance, since Tadcaster is only 16 miles from the battle site and could have been reached easily within the day.

Modern historians have differed in their interpretations concerning Harold's march to the north. DeVries believes Harold learned of the attack on 16 September while at London, then took nine days to gather forces and march the 200 miles from London to Tadcaster. Peter Poyntz Wright agrees, theorizing that Harold probably left between 18 September and 20 September, marching five miles per hour for 8 hours each day, and sent runners ahead to prepare supplies for the army at the sites he planned to stop at. Modern historian Sten Körner argues that King Harold pulled his southern levies inland from the coast to prevent Duke William from invading far inland and used his fleet to protect London. Then he marched north with mainly mounted household troops as an escort and gathered the northern levies along the way to surprise Haraldr in York. Higham adds that while at Tadcaster, the remnants of Edwin and Morcar's army probably

²⁵*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version C, D, and E, 1066; Snorri Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, 146.

joined Harold's, which would give Harold valuable information concerning the invading army.²⁶ The historians agree that Harold's march north was surprisingly fast, recalling his similar attack on Wales in 1063.

The Battle of Stamford Bridge

Modern scholars disagree about the value of the Norse Sagas for the Battle of Stamford Bridge. On one side of the argument are those who view the sagas as fiction. Sir Charles Oman wrote in the early twentieth century, "...it is sad that we cannot trust for a moment the noble narrative of the *Heimskringla*, the grandest battle tale of all the sagas. So many of its statements are utterly incorrect that we cannot accept the rest." Brown agrees and adds, "[*Heimskringla*] commits the stark anachronism of referring to barded horses, and leaves the alarming impression that its author is giving a garbled version of Hastings with the English in the role of the Normans and Harold Hardrada of Norway playing the part of Harold of England." Knowing the typical makeup and tactics of the Anglo-Saxon and Norwegian armies, military historians Nicholas Hooper and Matthew Bennett assume it was a hard-fought shield wall to shield wall infantry battle "of which little concrete is known."²⁷ These historians believe the sagas either made up the details of the battle or borrowed them from other battles, centering their argument on the improbability of an Anglo-Saxon cavalry.

²⁶DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, p. 264; Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, 196; Wright, *Hastings*, 39-40; Körner, *The Battle of Hastings*, 264.

²⁷Sir Charles Oman, *A History of England Before the Norman Conquest*, 6th ed. (London: Meuthen & Co., 1924; London: Bracken Books, 1994), 640; Brown, *The Normans and the Norman Conquest*, 83; Nicholas Hooper and Matthew Bennett, *Cambridge Illustrated Atlas of Warfare: The Middle Ages, 768-1487* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 44.

The opposing view holds that the sagas have truth in them if used carefully. DeVries believes, "it is impossible to accept the Norwegian Kings' Sagas' narratives of the battle of Stamford Bridge without questioning their credibility, nor is it responsible as a scholar to cursorily dismiss them." Although Wright agrees that Snorri Sturlson borrowed events from the Battle of Hastings to reconstruct the Battle of Stamford Bridge in the *Heimskringla*, he notes, "Some of Snorri's details, therefore, are open to question though other points of interest suggest that a substantial part of his story is accurate."²⁸ C.W. Hollister believes that adequate primary source documentation exists for the English to use horses for riding to battle and pursuit, but he does not think the English had the necessary training for the cavalry charges that supposedly occurred at Stamford Bridge.²⁹

Using the sources critically instead of dismissing them for fiction because of some potential errors makes more sense. Due to the scarcity of primary sources that cover medieval battles, especially Stamford Bridge, using logic to determine the plausibility of an event occurring better helps modern historians understand the past, rather than trying to "confirm" the event in another source (especially when a chronicle gets incorrect information from an earlier one and repeats the error). My recreation of the Battle of Stamford Bridge relies mostly on the Norse Kings' Sagas, supplemented by the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman sources.

On the morning of 25 September, Haraldr and Tostig left Ricall to meet with the York inhabitants, leaving their armor at the ships because of the good weather and because they did not expect to battle. Harald's son Olaf, the earls Páll and Erlendr of Orkney, and

²⁸DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 276; Wright, *Hastings*, 41.

²⁹Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions*, 137-40.

Eysteinn Ori (brother of Haraldr's concubine Thora) remained to protect the ships.

According to the *Morkinskinna* and *King Harald's Saga*, the Norwegians were traveling to meet at York, but the *Anglo-Saxon Version C* states instead that they were going to meet with the inhabitants at Stamford Bridge. Based upon Magnusson's earlier statement about the strategic importance of Stamford Bridge and the location where the battle took place, the English source makes more sense. All primary sources agree that Harold had completely surprised the Norwegians. According to the *King Harald's Saga*, Tostig and Haraldr saw the forces coming, and waited to see who they were instead of immediately sounding the alarm. Tostig guessed that it could be a hostile force or that other nobles were coming to submit to Haraldr. Marianus Scotus' chronicle states the Norwegians expected a small group of thegns and were not alarmed initially. As the army drew closer, Haraldr and Tostig realized it was King Harold.³⁰

DeVries believes that Saxo Grammaticus' mention of Norwegian soldiers plundering the countryside and Geoffrey Gaimar's recounting of cattle rustling demonstrates that some soldiers were separated from the main force on the east side of the river. Seeing stranded soldiers away from the main force would have presented an excellent opportunity for Harold to decrease the Norwegian manpower before the battle.³¹ Attacking isolated enemy soldiers would have been an ideal use for mounted Anglo-Saxons to pursue and destroy the individual soldiers. DeVries believes that the soldiers

³⁰Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, 88; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version C, 1066; *Mariani Scotti Chronicon - Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores*, Vol. V, ed. G.H. Pertz (Hannover, n.p., 1844), 559, cited in Walker, *Harold*, 162.

³¹Saxo Grammaticus, *Historia Danica*, ed. P.E. Müller and J.M. Veslschow (Hannover, n.p., 1839), II:555, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 278; Geoffrey Gaimar, *Lestoire des Engles*, I:221, cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 278-9.

caught on the west side of the river made an attempt to keep the English from crossing the bridge, which was probably the inspiration for the Anglo-Saxon Version C's story (added by a twelfth-century scribe, while none of the Norse Sagas contains this event) about "one Norwegian who stood firm against the English forces, so they could not cross the bridge nor clinch victory." While the fighting occurred on the west side of the river, King Haraldr and Tostig quickly planned their tactics for the upcoming battle (see Figure 15). According to Sturluson, Tostig recommended retreating back to Ricall to join with their other forces or board the ships, but Haraldr decided to send three horse riders for the Ricall forces, set up the battle formation, and wait for the English to cross the bridge.³²

Local tradition has this phase of the Battle of Stamford Bridge occur at an area called "Battlefield Flats."³³ Again, no sources document how many men were present at this battle. The Norwegians have had 6,000 to 8,000 men after the Fulford Gate battle, while the English would have had about the same strength they would had at Hastings, around 8,000. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* does not give detailed events of the battle, but the Norse Sagas fill in the details. According to *Morkinskinna*, Haraldr formed up his men in a linear pike formation with the archers in the rear to protect from encirclement. *King Harald's Saga* instead states that Haraldr set up his forces in a thin line, and pulled back the wings so that they would meet and result in a circle since he expected the English to use cavalry charges in their attack. Either of these formations demonstrate that Haraldr's forces were outnumbered by the English. The battlefield was gently sloping, ideal for

³²DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 280-1; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version C, 1066; Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, 88.

³³Brooks, *Stamford Bridge*, 20.

cavalry tactics, but historian Jim Bradbury suggests that it was also swampy, which would make the ground difficult for horses to maneuver. The Norwegian Kings sagas report that Harold offered to make peace with Tostig before the battle, giving him Northumbria and up to a third of England (all he would offer Haraldr was seven feet of land, or more since he was tall), but he refused. Harold's "half-hearted" cavalry charges prompted Haraldr to lead a small counter-attack, which resulted in a fierce struggle. Haraldr received an arrow through the throat (*Morkinskinna* reports a spear thrust in the throat), and once he was dead the contingent was easily defeated (the isolation and slaughter account sounds similar to what happens during the feigned retreats at the Battle of Hastings). Although it does not make sense for Haraldr to have left the shield wall, DeVries suggests that some of the soldiers went "berserk," which led to the dissolving of the shield wall. During a lull in the fighting, Harold offered quarter to Tostig and the remaining Norwegians, but again Tostig refused. The battle resumed with Tostig fighting under the Haraldr's standard, "Land Ravager."³⁴

Sturluson states that Orri and his Norwegian soldiers arrived late in the battle, and they brought armor with them unlike the earlier Norwegian force. Prince Olafr and his contingent remained to guard the ships, just as he did in Haraldr's earlier battle with Hakon in Sweden. *Morkinskinna* adds that since Tostig had already been killed, Orri picked up "Land Ravager" and charged into battle. The *Orkneyinga Saga* states that the Earls of Orkney and their men participated in this part of the battle. However, they had run the entire way from Ricall, and Sturluson writes that during the battle "some of the

³⁴Sturluson, *King Harald's Saga*, 89-92; *Morkinskinna*, 50; Bradbury, *Battle of Hastings*, 133; DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 291.

Norwegians collapsed from exhaustion and died unwounded.”³⁵ The English were victorious, and many of the Scandinavian soldiers fled the battlefield. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version D, adds the English pursued the Norwegians back to the ships at Ricall, killing more along the way. At Ricall, King Harold made peace with Olaf Haraldsson and the Earls of Orkney, and then allowed them and the Norwegian army remnant to return home, leaving in 24 ships when they arrived in 500. The Norwegians wintered in the Orkney Islands, and then returned to Norway.³⁶

Using the scarce amount of information in the Anglo-Saxon sources and combining it with the details of the Norse kings sagas, the following scenario best reconstructs the events of 25 September. Considering the English were attacking stranded soldiers on the west side of the river, overcame a hard-fought but brief struggle at the bridge, and then stormed Haraldr’s position on the east side of the river, the Anglo-Saxons were probably still on horseback and in pursuit mode during this phase of the battle. Ignoring the Norse Sagas’ pre-battle speeches and Harold giving an opportunity for Tostig to rejoin his side, this theory reconciles many inconsistencies in this battle narrative. None of the sources mention that the English formed into a battle formation, but instead charged into the Norwegian formation and encircled it, which leads one to a conclusion they were still pursuing the surprised Norwegians around Stamford Bridge. Next, the formation Haraldr chose was an entirely defensive position, and he would not want to retreat back to Ricall since the English would have continued the pursuit, cutting them down piecemeal along the way. Third, the Sturluson’s description of “half-hearted cavalry charges” may well

³⁵*Orkneyinga Saga*, 34; *Morkinskinna*, 50; Sturluson, *King Harald’s Saga*, 93.

³⁶Sturluson, *King Harald’s Saga*, 93-6; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version D, 1066.

have been inexperience, since almost all historians agree that the English could raid and pursue on horseback, but did not have the expertise for a cavalry tactics. Instead of totally dismissing an account because of a supposed improbability, one can argue that there a historical basis exists for the cavalry charge account at Stamford Bridge.

The surest cause for the defeat of the Norwegians at Stamford Bridge, noted by all the primary sources, was Harold's tenacity. He force-marched his troops from southern to northern England, gathering levies along the way, and undoubtedly received good intelligence on Haraldr's army while staying at Tadcaster. By achieving complete surprise, he caught the Norwegians unprepared and Haraldr probably lost many men before forming his shield wall.

Haraldr's decision to leave the armor at Ricall was another reason for the Norwegian defeat stated in most chronicles. The infantry shield wall became more vulnerable since the soldiers' mid-sections were more susceptible to penetration from sword thrusts and slashes. Once injured, a soldier would become a spectator instead of a participant in the battle, and the likelihood of him surviving the battle decreased too.

The surprise and the lack of armor alone were devastating enough, but combining them made the effects even worse. The cavalry charges described in the Norse sagas were most likely the mounted Anglo-Saxon thegns running down unprepared and armorless Norwegian soldiers. Haraldr's formation of a shield wall with a "thin line" seems to indicate that many of the Norwegians were already killed and reinforcements were not available (the English formed a shield wall seven to eight lines deep at the Battle of Hastings).

Although the Norse sagas state the battle took all day and both sides slaughtered each other, the battle ended quickly even with Orri's reinforcements. The victorious English acquired an easy victory and acquired Norwegian arms and armament, including barely-used armor. However, King Harold would not have long to enjoy the victory, since Duke William of Normandy landed at Pevensey three days later.

CHAPTER 4

BATTLE OF HASTINGS

King Harold gained victory over one invader. However, Duke William still intended to cross the English Channel and win the English crown by a battlefield victory. Both Duke William and King Harold made political alliances to strengthen their claims to the throne and get support in their military affairs. William needed allies to bolster his invading force and prevent attacks on Normandy during his invasion, while in contrast Harold did not set up alliances outside England.

William had to gather allies to invade England and at the same time had to secure Normandy from attack. He first had to convince his Norman nobles to join him on this adventure, and negotiated the number of ships and men with each of them. According to Robert of Wace, William held two councils: one with a select group of six to eight magnates to counsel him, which led to a later one with all of his magnates because of the increased resources required to invade England. Historian Elisabeth Van Houts states that William developed a ship and knight quota for each of his magnates for this expedition, which made up most of the invasion force that defeated King Harold. He left his wife Matilda and Roger of Beaumont to run the affairs of Normandy in his absence, and he made peace with Denmark and the Holy Roman Empire. William of Poitiers referred to a Danish contingent under Harold's banner, but these were probably Danish

mercenaries who were part of Harold's core of professional soldiers.¹ William of Poitiers also mentions that Duke William received a papal banner from Pope Alexander II, signifying the "approval of St Peter, by following which he might attack the enemy with greater confidence and safety".² According to the chroniclers Orderic Vitalis and William of Poitiers and modern historian Sten Körner, William also recruited men from Maine, France, Brittany, Poitou, Anjou, Flanders, Boulogne, Ponthieu, and Burgundy. Körner also reviewed William's political relations with other French provinces and foreign countries and concluded that he probably did not receive substantial manpower support outside Normandy.³

Harold did not seem to have allies outside England, but Körner suggests that he may either not have had the need for them or the time for diplomacy. Modern historian N.J. Higham estimates that Harold had been Earl of Wessex since 1053, while two of his brothers had been earls since 1057: Gyrrh in East Anglia and Leofwine in Southeast Midlands. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* recounts that Harold secured Wales with help from his brother Tostig (Earl of Northumbria since 1055) in 1063, and cemented relations with Edwin (Earl of Mercia) by marrying his sister Ealdgyth (the Welsh king's widow). The other border was Scotland, and according to Symeon of Durham, Tostig and Malcolm III became sworn brothers. While Tostig was Earl of Northumbria, no serious

¹Elisabeth M.C. van Houts, "The Ship List of William the Conqueror," in *Anglo-Norman Studies X: The Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1987*, ed. R. Allen Brown (Wolfenboro, New Hampshire: The Boydell Press, 1988), 171-2; Wace, *Roman de Rou*, ii, 107-8 as cited in van Houts, "Ship List," 161; William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.1, 2.3, 2.8, 2.26, 2.43.

²William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.43.

³Orderic Vitalis, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, 7.34; Körner, *Battle of Hastings*, 220, 253-5; William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.19.

raids came from Scotland, and the ones Malcolm led at the beginning of his reign and in 1061 while Tostig was on pilgrimage were quickly put down.⁴ King Harold expected invasions from other countries, so he tried to ensure that he had no internal discord and that his borders with Wales and Scotland were secure.

King Harold realized he would need to protect England's borders from other rulers who would want to take the English crown. He watched the English Channel coast for William's invasion, but left Earls Edwin and Morcar in northern England to protect against any Scandinavian invasions.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Tostig, with support from Baldwin of Flanders, landed at the Isle of Wight to attack King Harold in 1066. Harold gathered his fleet at Sandwich to attack Tostig, but Tostig left and raided up the English coast until forced out by Earls Edwin and Morcar, resembling his father Earl Godwine's strategy to convince King Edward to re-instate him in 1052, but that time it worked.⁵ Harold kept a watchful eye toward Duke William until 8 September, and released his naval and land levies (unfortunately losing many ships in a storm on their way back to London). Tostig eventually went to Scotland and negotiated an invasion with King Haraldr of Norway. Earls Edwin and Morcar tried to stop the invasion at Gate Fulford on 20 September, but Haraldr and Tostig defeated them and took over York. Instead of remaining inside York, Haraldr awaited hostages at Stamford Bridge, where Harold had marched north and caught him by surprise. Both Haraldr and Tostig died during this hard fought battle, and

⁴Körner, *Battle of Hastings*, 220; N.J. Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, 126; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Versions D and E, 1063; Symeon of Durham *Historia regum*, II:174, as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 175; *Vita Ædwardi*, 66-7, as cited in DeVries, *The Norwegian Invasion*, 175.

⁵Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, 186.

Harold allowed the remaining Norwegians to sail back away with a promise never to return.⁶ The Battle of Stamford Bridge had two important consequences: this would be the last major Scandinavian invasion of England and Harold lost men he would need for any upcoming battles. Meanwhile, Duke William gathered his forces and prepared to cross the English Channel.

After gathering his forces and building his fleet at Dives in lower Normandy, William awaited the right prevailing winds to invade England (see Figure 16).⁷ Wace's estimate of 696 ships serve as the accepted standard, and modern historian C.M. Gillmor argues convincingly that William commandeered existing Norman ships, hired ships from other provinces, and as a last resort built ships at Dives to transport the Norman army across the channel. She adds that William would have used a deeper ocean-going Gokstad ship instead of the more tipsy Ladby ship (which looks like the ships in the Bayeux Tapestry) to transport horses.⁸

Why did William wait so long to make the crossing and why did he move from Dives to Saint Valéry? Chronicler William of Poitiers stated that Duke William waited a month for the right winds, attempted to cross the channel, and was forced to land at Saint Valéry in Ponthieu instead of sailing to England. He also mentioned some of the difficulties William had in maintaining an inactive army in Saint Valéry, "[William] whom neither the delay and the contrary wind nor the terrible shipwrecks nor the craven flight of many

⁶*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Versions C, D, and E, 1066.

⁷William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, ii, 2.

⁸C.M. Gillmor, "Naval Logistics of the Cross-Channel Operation, 1066," in *The Battle of Hastings: Sources and Interpretations*, ed. Stephen Morillo, Warfare in History Series, ed. Matthew Bennett, no. 1 (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1998), 119-20, 128.

who had pledged their faith to him could shake, committed himself with the utmost confidence. . .to the protection of heaven. . .[and] retained the terrified and put heart into the fearful.”⁹. The quote demonstrates that despite adverse weather, losses during the journey from Dives to Saint Valéry, and the departure of those who no longer wanted to participate on the expedition, William kept his determination to invade England and maintain his army’s morale. William of Poitiers states that when good weather set in, Duke William appeared joyful that he could finally make the crossing to England.

Modern historians have offered alternative reasons for William’s postponed invasion and move from Dives to Saint Valéry. R.H.C Davis and Marjorie Chibnall believe that he did not want to cross while King Harold’s fleet actively patrolled the channel, waiting until the Harold’s 8 September dismissal. Historian J. Neumann suggests that the stormy English Channel during the first weeks of September might have provided another reason not to cross, and even Harold lost some of his ships when they sailed back to London. Regardless of Harold’s fleet or bad weather, why did William move his fleet to Saint Valéry? Military historian Christopher Gravett asserts that the Dives’ resources could no longer support the gathered army, prompting William to move to another location that happened to be closer to Pevensey. Mark Gardiner believes that historical sources and archaeological evidence support that almost all voyages across the English Channel were made between embarkation and disembarkation points that faced each other directly, providing cultural, political, and commercial links. St Valéry is almost directly across the channel from Pevensey, and most likely these ports already had merchants sailing

⁹William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.6.

between them. Historians Christine and Gerald Grainge use their sailing experience to support the William of Poitiers' original story about waiting to set sail and the landing at Saint Valéry. They believe William waited for the best possible conditions to set sail. They add that William's fleet went off-course attempting to cross the channel, and bad weather pushed his ships into the Saint Valéry estuary at low tide while still dark, causing the shipwrecks.¹⁰

Carrying soldiers, horses, and supplies, the Norman fleet made an overnight voyage and landed with no resistance at Pevensey on Saint Michael's Eve, September 28, according to the D Version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (see Figure 17). The E Version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tells that William landed at Hastings on September 29, but E. A. Freeman argues that both dates are correct: William arrived at Pevensey first and then moved to Hastings the following day. Using the Bayeux Tapestry as a guide that the Norman ships were based on Viking transport ships and estimating the sailing conditions, J. Neuman determined that William left between 17 and 18 GMT on the evening of September 27, or 18 and 19 GMT on September 28, at high tide, which makes it easier to sail out of the Somme Estuary and takes advantage of the prevailing WNW winds (this wind direction would produce the best speed). He waited off the Somme Estuary until daylight, then set sail to cross the channel. He would arrive in England during daylight

¹⁰Davis and Chibnall, eds, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 108; J. Neumann, "Hydrographic and Ship-Hydrnamic Aspects of the Norman Invasion, AD 1066," in *Anglo-Norman Studies, 1988, Proceedings of the Battle Conference*, ed. R. Allen Brown (Wolfeboro, New Hampshire: The Boydell Press, 1989), 222-3; Gravett, *Hastings, 1066*, 43; Mark Gardiner, "Shipping and Trade Between England and the Continent During the Eleventh Century," in *Anglo-Norman Studies XXII, Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1990*, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 2000), 71, 76-8; Christine and Gerald Grainge, "The Pevensey Expedition: Brilliantly Executed Plan or Near Disaster?," in *The Battle of Hastings: Sources and Interpretations*, ed. Stephen Morillo, Warfare in History Series, ed. Matthew Bennett, no. 1 (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1998), 137-41; William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.6.

and although the Pevensey Estuary would be flowing outward, the wind would have pushed the ships to shore for disembarking.¹¹

Most ships landed at Pevensey, although some landed off course, including two that came ashore at Romney where the inhabitants slaughtered their crews.¹² Although the exact invasion location will maybe never be know, the Norman fleet was not a professional navy and the ships probably landed in multiple locations on Sussex's coast. Duke William reached England without Harold's awareness, achieving a surprise that equals the latter's on King Haraldr of Norway at Stamford Bridge.

Upon his arrival in England, Duke William had to set up a base camp, reconnoiter the area and news on King Harold, and forage for supplies. He brought his castle-building paradigm with him, and according to Williams of Jumièges, "...[he landed] at Pevensey, where at once he built a strongly entrenched fortification. . .and speedily went to Hastings, where he quickly raised another one." William did not build these castles from nothing, but as historian Richard L.C. Jones mentions, raised them within the walls of a Roman shore fort in Pevensey and a prehistoric enclosure at Hastings. Historian Richard Glover believes that William realized his tenuous position on the peninsula, and built the fortification in case of enforced re-embarkation. It seems that William did not intend to make the same mistake that King Haraldr of Norway made at Stamford Bridge; he set up an easily defended and fortified base close to the coast to protect his troops and his ships. Additionally, setting up castles to attack the local area and protect his own position fit

¹¹William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.8; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version D and Version E, 1066; E.A. Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest of England*, as cited by Davis and Chibnall, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 112; J. Neuman, "Hydrographic Aspects of Invasion," 235-238.

¹²William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.27.

into William's way of warfare. To get a feel for the local area and learn the whereabouts of Harold, William and 25 companions scouted the difficult terrain of Hastings's peninsula. The Bayeux Tapestry depicts the camp-building, foraging, ravaging, feasting, and planning for war that occurred upon arrival in England (see Figure 18).¹³

Duke William chose the Hastings peninsula as his base camp for several reasons. The short distance between this area and Normandy is the most obvious one, allowing him to get to England in the minimal time and without detection by potential English coast watchers. Gravett describes another benefit--the multitude of paths that go to London, William's ultimate location. The best road from Hastings to London followed the coast and went through Dover. Another route through Rochester had three drawbacks: the road's bad condition, the necessary fording across the River Brede (although a path did circumnavigate the river), and the fact that the section from Rochester to London passed through woodlands (placing cavalry at a disadvantage and setting up an ideal location for an ambush). Third, the peninsula's terrain made it difficult to traverse and easy to defend. The west section contained the Bulverhythe lagoon, the east one had the marshy valleys of the rivers Brede and Rother, and the Andredsweald woodlands surrounded the Hastings peninsula (see Figure 17). Van Houts reasons that the Fécamp monks accompanying William knew Hastings and its area well since Knútr and King Edward the Confessor gave lands in Sussex to them.

¹³Williams of Jumièges, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, 7.14; Richard L.C. Jones, "Fortifications and Sieges in Western Europe, c. 800-1450," in *Medieval Warfare, A History*, ed. Maurice Keen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 170; Richard Glover, "English Warfare in 1066," in *The Battle of Hastings: Sources and Interpretations*, ed. Stephen Morillo, Warfare in History Series, ed. Matthew Bennett, no. 1 (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1998), 175; William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.9; Cowdrey, "Bayeux Tapestry," 60.

Finally, Higham suggests that Sussex was King Harold's family's earldom, and ravaging it was a personal attack on King Harold. Military historian Hans Delbrück did not believe that William plundered Sussex since it would have prevented their support of him as king. However, since Harold maintained his position of Earl of Wessex, it becomes clear that Duke William tried to stir him to action. Historian John France believes that medieval leaders gambled a battle only when the stakes were high enough to take the risk.¹⁴ Being late in the campaign season and William's support from his allies tenuous, William wanted to bring Harold to battle as soon as possible without leaving his secure base at Hastings.

King Harold learned of William's landing in England while recovering from the Battle of Stamford Bridge on October 1, stopping at London "to make final preparations and raise more troops" from October 5 to October 12, and reached Hastings on October 13 according to Körner. Wace adds that King Harold gathered additional men during his march from Stamford Bridge to Hastings. Richard Abels believes that the military households of Harold and his brothers may have accounted for a significant portion of the English army at Hastings due to the haste to attack William. Körner gives a different opinion, starting with Harold's original march to York. He states that Harold had pulled his southern levies inland from the coast to allow Duke William to land on the coast, but not allow him to penetrate further. Harold used his fleet to protect London, and then he marched up with an escort to gather the northern levies to surprise attack King Haraldr

¹⁴Gravett, *Hastings 1066*, 54; van Houts, ed, *Gesta Guillelmi*, xxiv-v, 102; Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, 210-1; Hans Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, 4 vols, trans. Walter J. Renfro, Jr., vol. 3: *Medieval Warfare* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 155; France, *Western Warfare*, 12-3.

Harðráði, which explains how Harold moved north to York and south to Hastings so quickly. He and a small mounted company made the journey, and he rallied his southern levies at London before marching to Hastings. Historian Jim Bradbury agrees with Körner as far as that Harold marched fast because he and his thegns rode down to Hastings, while the levies marched from south or southwest England. Not only did Harold try to act quickly to corner William at Hastings with his army, he also planned to use his navy. Chronicler Williams of Poitiers states that Harold sent his London fleet to prevent the Normans from escaping, although Davis and Chibnall disagree with William since the fleet had already wintered.¹⁵ Accepting Körner's argument, the fleet would still be active during Harold's time in London, and he would have had enough time to order his fleet to sail out when he marched with his troops to Hastings.

On the other hand, Körner's suggestion that the southern inland defenses prevented William from besieging London does not seem entirely true due to other factors that would have stopped him: the length of time it would take to break down London's defenses with or without siege weaponry, leaving the easily defended Hastings peninsula for a more vulnerable location outside London's walls, and a lack of support from London's elite. Duke William took over London in late November or early December in 1066 very easily, but only after King Harold's army was destroyed, the Normans were pillaging and plundering the countryside, and the remaining military and political elite

¹⁵Körner, *The Battle of Hastings*, 264-6; E. A. Freeman, *A History of the Norman Conquest of England*, Third Edition, (Clarendon, 1877), 234-5, as cited in Wright, *Hastings*, 67-8; Abels, "Bookland and Fyrd Service," 76; Bradbury, *Battle of Hastings*, 165-7; William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.14; Davis and Chibnall, ed, *Gesta Guillelmi* 2, 124.

surrendered (King Edgar, Earls Edwin and Morcar, Archbishop Stigand of Canterbury, Archbishop Ealdred of York).¹⁶

King Harold and Duke William battled near the Wessex town of Hastings. Although no one will ever know the actual number of participants in the battle, both the chroniclers and modern historians made estimates. Both Harold and William picked terrain suitable for their types of armies and displayed good generalship during the battle, but they also had to deal with the friction of war, meaning that circumstances during battle can have an adverse impact on the outcome.

The numbers for the Norman army's strength varies from the primary sources to modern scholars' best guesses. William of Poitiers estimates as high as 60,000. Of the nineteenth century military historians, Hans Delbrück estimates 4,000-7,000 and Sir Charles Oman's liberal guess, based upon the boat number from primary sources and how many horses and men could fit on them, is 12,000 men. Van Houts, based upon her strong argument that the *Ship List of William the Conqueror* is a legitimate source, estimates that 280 knights, on 696 ships, crossed the channel, but she does not provide a total strength. Additionally, France estimates the Normans mobilized a total of 14,000 men, including 6,000-7,000 fighters. Although primary sources seem to exaggerate the number in an attempt to show support for Duke William's claim, the Norman army only numbered around a few thousand.¹⁷

¹⁶ Körner, *The Battle of Hastings*, 265-6; Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, 218-9.

¹⁷ William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.11; Delbrück, *Medieval Warfare*, p. 152; Sir Charles Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols, vol 1: 378-1278 AD (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1998), 158; van Houts, "The Ship List," 166; John France, *Western Warfare*, 128; Körner, *Battle of Hastings*, 254.

The English total strength estimates vary, but are consistently lower than the Norman ones. Sir Charles Oman, based upon the 1100 yards length of the position on Senlac Hill and the fact that to throw a javelin or swing an axe each person needs about three feet, and that the lines went from eight to ten deep, estimates 10,000 to 11,000 men. Hans Delbrück estimates 4,000 to 7,000 men, believing that Harold did not have time to gather a larger army. Gravett gives the best estimate, believing 8,000 housecarls and fyrd troops were at Hastings, and additional *fyrd* units may have arrived during the battle.¹⁸

Before the battle opened, both William of Poitiers and the Bayeux Tapestry recount that Harold and William sent envoys back and forth to each other, used mainly for intelligence gathering of the opponent's strength rather than peace negotiations. Körner believes that because of Harold's rush to Hastings, he did not send envoys until the armies drew up for battle. Knowing the opponent's strength and status helped to determine whether the armies would form up for battle or not. Although many military historians cite Harold's rush in getting to Hastings as a reason for his loss (as covered below), Bradbury argues that Harold had sufficient numbers to face William and high morale from the victory at Stamford Bridge, or he would not have challenged him. Historian Stephen Morillo gives additional insight into the strategic situation that impacted the battle: Harold only had to fight to a draw and William had to win. Harold could draw upon the rest of England for supplies, while William would not be able to last the winter in the Hastings peninsula and Harold's fleet would prevent reinforcements or supplies by sea. Scouting provided another way for armies to gather intelligence on each

¹⁸Oman, *Art of War in the Middle Ages*, 156; Delbrück, *Medieval Warfare*, 152; Gravett, *Hastings*, 20.

other. For example, William of Poitiers tells how Norman scouting knights prevented a surprise night attack by Harold, and the warning allowed William to prepare his forces. Nineteenth Century historian Sir Charles Oman provides a dissenting opinion that Harold would not attack at night since his army was tired from marching, he had no intelligence on William's camp, and William would have been prepared for it.¹⁹ Oman's last point is correct, but Harold had already proven his ability to strike when least expected and medieval armies did have the ability to discover information about opposing armies.

Gravett estimates that dawn broke at 0520, and since it was unusually light, William probably led his march from Hastings area at 0600 and arrived at Telhalm Hill in an hour. Gravett believes that William intended to attack Harold in the open field and caught Harold by surprise. Bradbury adds that Harold was still at his assembly point when William came upon him, and then he lined up his troops for battle. The location of the meeting place mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is now marked by the Caldbec windmill.²⁰ Harold most likely chose the location because of its strategic value, protecting different roads leading to London, and its tactical value of high ground and rough terrain that limited cavalry effectiveness (see Figure 17).

Meanwhile, Harold stationed his forces on a formidable hill with a steep gradient according to William of Poitiers and lined up in a dense formation, which according to military historian John France, was the best way for infantry to defend against cavalry

¹⁹William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.11-2.13; H.E.J. Cowdrey, "Towards an Interpretation of the Bayeux Tapestry," 61; Körner, *Battle of Hastings*, 261; Bradbury, *Battle of Hastings*, 164-5; Morillo, ed. *Battle of Hastings*, 225; William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.14; Oman, *Art of War*, 153.

²⁰ Gravett, *Hastings*, 59-60; Bradbury, *Battle of Hastings*, 180-2; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version D, 1066; Wright, *Hastings*, 77.

attacks (see Figure 19). Traditionally, the battle occurred on Senlac (meaning sandy lake) Hill where Battle Abbey is now located, but Bradbury suggests that Caldbec Hill was the actual location (see Figure 20). Not only does Caldbec Hill match the locations where the battle was fought, it also has a small lake near it (where the term "Senlac" most likely comes from) and the place traditionally known as Malfosse is just to its rear, which provides a path that a retreating army would likely cross. Here Harold placed his two banners, the Dragon and the Fighting Man, which France states Harold would have used as a rallying point and to command his army. R. Allen Brown adds that because of the hurriedness, the housecarls and thegns (the English warrior elite who would have rode horses to battle) lined up across the hilltop and the archers could not make it to the battle on time, but as stated above by Bradbury, William came upon Harold at the rallying point so there would have been levies present. William set up his troops near the bottom of the hill, placing his archers in the front rank, his foot soldiers in the second rank, and his cavalry in the third, and all behind the papal banner to show which side had divine backing. Morillo believes that William placed the Breton contingent on the left, the Normans in the middle, and the Franco-Flemish contingent on the right.²¹

The Battle of Hastings

Gravett believes that the battle began in the third hour of daylight at 0900 (see Figure 21). William of Poitiers states that the Norman archers advanced and fired arrows first, then the infantry and cavalry followed in waves that proved ineffective, while the English

²¹ William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.16; France, *Western Warfare*, 156, 158, 161; Bradbury, *Battle of Hastings*, 175, 209-11; R. Allen Brown, "The Battle of Hastings," in *Anglo-Norman Warfare: Studies in Late Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman Military Organization and Warfare*, ed. Matthew Strickland, 1993 Reprint (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1992), 170-1; Morillo, *Battle of Hastings*, xxv.

threw javelins, axes, and other missiles with such effect that it easily penetrated shields and armor. As seen in the Bayeaux Tapestry, Norman cavalry used their lances in both a couched position and an overarm one to attack the shield wall (see Figure 6). Gravett believes that eventually the Norman archers would have run out of arrows since they could retrieve few if any from the English archers, and would have to receive more from camp.²² The shield wall remained intact at the top of the hill and none of the thegns broke the ranks, so the Normans could not use their cavalry to overrun the English.

According to William of Poitiers, a crisis then occurred on the Norman side. The standard fell down and a rumor went through the lines that Duke William had been killed (he was actually unhorsed). The Normans began to retreat, and the left wing almost fled. William went personally to the left flank, showing his face so that his men could see he still lived (see Figure 7). He rallied the men to turn back and counterattacked, destroying the isolated English who pursued them down the hill and left the relative safety of the hill and shield wall (see Figure 6). The questions remains over who led the failed English pursuit of the Normans. Because the Bayeux Tapestry shows the deaths of Gyrð and Leofwine before the Norman cavalry falls in the hillock (see Figure 6), Gravett believes they led the pursuit.²³ According to the *Carmen*, William was directly responsible for killing Gyrð, who threw a spear that killed William's horse. William attacked Gyrð in hand-to-hand combat and killed him, saying "Take the crown you have earned from us,"

²² Gravett, *Hastings*, 65; William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.17; Bayeaux Tapestry, Pl. 65, as shown in R. Allen Brown, "Battle of Hastings," 175.

²³ William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.17-2.18; Gravett, *Hastings*, 72.

meaning he thought Gyrð was Harold.²⁴ Military historian J.F.C. Fuller points out that if Harold had advanced his infantry as a whole and pursued the retreating Norman army, he would have easily overtaken the infantry and archers, causing the cavalry to have to flee. However, Morillo asserts that Harold probably did lead an advance on the retreating Normans, but in the process Gyrð and Leofwine were killed. The advance stopped, and the English had to retreat slowly back to the top of the hill.²⁵ Each army had a crisis and regrouped. The Normans almost fled to their ships and the English lost two of their leaders and many of those on their right flank, but their commanders regrouped them and continued the battle.

Seeing how successfully his counterattack worked, Duke William feigned additional retreats to draw English soldiers to leave the shield wall (and R. Allen Brown argues strongly that the Norman cavalry was cohesive and trained enough to perform this maneuver). William also had his archers fire continual barrages of arrows, and the combination of the two tactics eventually opened gaps in the English line. Once the English morale broke, the Norman cavalry could pursue and slaughter the Anglo-Saxons (which ironically recalls how Harold had destroyed the Norwegians at Stamford Bridge), including Harold.²⁶ In one section of the Bayeux Tapestry, one panel has two individuals

²⁴ *The Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, Catherine Horton and Hope Muntz, ed., in *The Battle of Hastings: Sources and Interpretations*, ed. Stephen Morillo, Warfare in History Series, ed. Matthew Bennett, no. 1 (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1998) 49.

²⁵ J.F.C. Fuller, "The Battle of Hastings, 1066," in *The Battle of Hastings: Sources and Interpretations*, ed. Stephen Morillo, Warfare in History Series, ed. Matthew Bennett, no. 1 (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1998), 168-9; Morillo, ed., *Battle of Hastings*, 224.

²⁶ William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.20-2.21, 2.23; Brown, "Battle of Hastings," 175-6.

under the phrase loosely translated as “Here King Harold Was Killed (see Figure 22).”²⁷

Scholars debate whether the first figure is supposed to be King Harold (an individual with the arrow sticking through the eye) or the second one (with a Norman knight running the man over). N.P. Brooks convincingly argues that both of these individuals are the same person: King Harold fell after taking an arrow through the eye, and a Norman knight killed him. Bayeux Tapestry expert David Bernstein agrees with Brooks, discovering that the second figure has holes in the linen that would match the arrow in the first figure. Bernstein believes that it represents two things: a biblical reference that oath perjurers were blinded (remember Harold’s oath to support Duke William in the English succession) and a restitution for Godwine’s killing of ætheling Alfred, the half-Norman younger brother of Edward the Confessor. The *Carmen* states that William, Eustace of Boulogne, Hugh of Ponthieu, and Giffard killed Harold while he was already in the midst of fighting and killing other Normans, though this is unlikely. According to chronicler Williams of Jumièges, the battle began at the third hour after dawn and lasted until nightfall. The sun set that evening at 1704, leaving no light for a Norman pursuit, and modern experiments have shown that the area would have become so dark and the ground so treacherous that a mounted pursuit would have been impossible.²⁸

The Battle Abbey chronicle mentions the “Malfosse incident” that supposedly occurred after the battle, when the English ambushed Norman cavalry in a pit and

²⁷ *The Bayeux Tapestry and the Norman Invasion, With an Introduction and a Translation From the Contemporary Account of William of Poitiers*, ed. Lewis Thorpe (London: The Folio Society, 1973), plates 77-8.

²⁸ David Bernstein, “The Blinding of Harold and the Meaning of the Bayeux Tapestry,” in *Anglo-Norman Studies V: The Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1982*, ed. R. Allen Brown (Totowa, New Jersey: Biblio Distribution Services 1983), 64; *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio of Bishop Guy of Amiens*, 50-1; Williams of Jumièges, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, 7.15.

destroyed them, but modern scholars believe that it was a rehash of the left flank collapse during the battle or it did not happen. Bradbury counters that if Caldbec Hill is the actual battle site, then the Malfosse area would have been a natural retreat site for the English and a place to ambush the Normans.²⁹

After taking care of the dead and leaving a castellan in charge of Hastings, William of Poitiers states that Duke William moved on to attack Romney for its inhabitants slaughter of his men who were off-course and landed on its shore. The remaining English leaders saw the results of the Battle of Hastings as a sign from God concerning Harold's crowning, and passed the crown to the ætheling Edgar instead of Harold's sons who were of military age.³⁰ However, due to the loss of Harold's political leadership and that of his brothers, and the many thegns killed at Gate Fulford, Stamford Bridge, and Hastings, William became King of England by the end of the year.

Why Did William Win at Hastings?

Chroniclers and historians have developed several reasons for William's victory over Harold, ranging from God's will to Harold's poor generalship. Reviewing the different explanations gives a starting point to determine where the praises and faults lie in the battle's outcome.

The Chronicles give many reasons for the Norman victory at Hastings. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Version D states, "King Harold was slain, and Leofwine, his brother, and Gyrð, his brother, and many good men. The French had possession of the place of

²⁹ Gravett, *Hastings*, 80; *Chronicle of Battle Abbey*, ed. and trans. Eleanor Searle, Oxford Medieval Text Series, ed. C.L. Brooke, P.E. Greenway, M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 39, in original manuscript folio 10; Bradbury, *Battle of Hastings*, 209-11.

³⁰ William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.27; Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, 213.

slaughter, as God granted them because of the nation's sins." Version E of the *Chronicle* gives a different reason, "...Harold marched from the north, and fought against [William] before all his host came up." From the English point of view, Harold had rushed into battle before he was ready, and because of England's sins God had given them a new ruler, William.³¹

The Norman chronicles blame Harold and his family for God's judgment. William of Poitiers wrote: "You have reaped the reward you deserved...So fall those...who...seize power...and strive to retain it by force of arms...[and] stained yourself in your brother's blood...[and] rushed madly into another conflict...[the Halley's comet appearing in early 1066] foretold your doom."³² William of Jumieges states that the loss was "God's retribution for their unjust murder of Alfred, King Edward's brother."³³

Orderic Vitalis blames Harold for not heeding his brother Gyrrh's advice to remain behind so he would not risk death "lest the liberty of the English perish through your ruin." Orderic Vitalis also expands God's judgment to sinners on both sides:

Thus on 14 October God punished the sinners on both sides in diverse ways. For while madness was raging among the Normans God slaughtered many thousands of Englishmen, who long before had unjustly murdered the innocent Alfred and on the previous Saturday without mercy had slain King Harold, Earl Tostig, and many others. The following night the same Judge avenged the English and plunged the fierce Normans into the abyss of destruction [Malfosse]. For they had been guilty of coveting the goods of other men contrary to the precept of the law, and as the Psalmist says: 'Their feet were swift to shed blood' and so they encountered grief and wretchedness in their ways.³⁴

³¹ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Version D, E, 1066.

³² William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, 2.25.

³³ Williams of Jumièges, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, 7.16.

³⁴ Orderic Vitalis *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, 7.35-6.

Even though William fought a perjurer (enough English and Norman support that Harold promised to back William's claim to the throne on holy relics) and had the pope's support, a council of Norman bishops under Ermenfrid of Sion imposed a penance on William's troops that fought at Hastings, including a year's penance for killing a man, 40 days of penance for archers who did not know how many they killed, and 40 days penance if the perpetrator did not know whether a man he wounded lived or died.³⁵ According to Bishop Ermenfrid, killing for just cause was still punishable.

The nineteenth century historians also give reasons for the Norman victory. Sir Charles Oman believes it was the combination of cavalry and archers that finally wore down the shield wall. Hans Delbrück faults Harold's defensive strategy, since it only leads to victory if the army later goes on the offensive, and he does not believe Harold had the appropriate command structure to do so. Additionally, he rushed into battle when he could have waited until he recruited more men.³⁶

Modern historians have a wide range of explanations for the Norman victory. R. Allen Brown believes that Harold's rush to fight William, William's advance to take the initiative away from Harold, and superior Norman cavalry and military techniques (feigned retreats, William preventing a Norman rout) led to the victory. John Gillingham credits a decisive advantage in missile delivery (number of archers and use of crossbows) and William's vast war experience over Harold's. Walker and Higham agree both sides were evenly matched, but the friction of war, especially Harold's death, ended the battle

³⁵Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, 268.

³⁶Oman, *Art of War*, 166; Delbrück, *Medieval Warfare*, p. 154-6.

in the Norman's favor. Peter Poyntz Wright credits William's psychological warfare and battle leadership. William attacked England's morale by obtaining the papal banner (making the attack on Harold a sort of crusade) and ravaging the countryside. During the battle, his leadership prevented a collapse of his line during "the crisis", and he used his cavalry and archers to storm Harold's right flank at the battle's end, resulting in Harold's death and the English army's breaking. Stephen Morillo remarks that Hastings was "an unusual battle" for the Middle Ages. The eight-hour battle was long, the opponents were evenly matched, the results were decisive for the English and Normans, and both commanders displayed excellent leadership.³⁷

³⁷R. Allen Brown, *The Normans and the Norman Conquest*, 204-5, 212-3, 218; Gillingham, "Age of Expansion," 71; Walker, *Harold*, 180-1; Higham, *Death of Anglo-Saxon England*, 213; Wright, *Hastings*, 89, 104-5; Morillo, ed. *Battle of Hastings*, 220-1, 226-7.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Harold's loss at the Battle of Hastings should not overshadow his record as a proven military commander. He showed ability for effective lightning strike attacks over 800 years before the German's *Blitzkrieg* in World War II during his time as earl and as king. At Stamford Bridge, he defeated the most experienced western European military leader, King Haraldr Harðraði of Norway. Several approaches demonstrate Harold's capacity as a general. First, comparing the English, Norwegian, and Norman military systems presents the tools that the political leaders could use to enforce their policies if no political solution was possible. The methods used to raise an army and navy and the types of weapons they used drove the strategy and tactics. The next step in understanding King Harold's military ability is to compare his campaigns with the ones of his opponents in 1066: King Haraldr and Duke William. Each of them has a unique and varied background, which makes the results of the 1066 battles even more interesting. With the background information about these warlords and the armies they have at their disposal, the decisions and actions Harold, Haraldr, and William took in their campaigns in 1066 become more clear. All three warlords knew they risked their lives and their titles when they fought these high-risk battles, but they thought the kingdom of England worth the gamble.

The English, Norwegian, and Norman military systems were fairly similar in military systems and weapons. The English and Norwegians had a stable system in place to

surround their professional soldiers with part-time levies. Normandy's system relied more on the Duke's personal influence with his vassals, both secular and ecclesiastical, who had fluid loyalties. For the infantry, all three areas shared many types of weapons, such as the sword, spear, and bow and arrow. The English and to a greater extent the Norwegians had a sizable fleet they used to protect their ports and to transport troops. The Norwegians and Normans used their fleets to transport their armies to England. However, the Normans had to expand theirs greatly to transport their forces across the channel, which shows outstanding leadership on William's part to undertake something he was not an expert in.

Neither the English nor the Norwegians typically used horses in battle, although they were useful for transporting thegns and for raids. Conversely, the cavalry was highly important for the Normans, who relied on a strongpoint castle strategy. They built a castle and gave it a supporting garrison to protect important places on the Normandy frontier. They used cavalry based from castles to lead raids in surrounding territories and lead sorties against the enemy when under siege. In battle, the Normans relied on their infantry (especially the archers) to cause breaks in the enemy formation for the cavalry to penetrate. William showed his penchant for castle-building when he landed at Pevensey and later moved to Hastings, because he quickly built a castle at both locations. Not only did they give him a secure base to control the local area, but kept him from being surprised like King Haraldr at Stamford Bridge.

In Haraldr's instance, his fleet performed a similar role to a castle since it served as a base for him to attack the surrounding area. One historian did not understand why Haraldr kept his fleet so far from York since Haraldr would seem to want to be near the

city he wanted to control. The most likely reason appears to be that beached ships are highly vulnerable to fleets and armies. Haraldr likely kept his fleet location away from strategic roads and tried to keep its location as little known as possible to make it less susceptible to attack. If Harold Godwineson had known where the Norwegian fleet was located, he probably would have attacked it.

Any discussion about the various claims to succession is tenuous at best. The traditional succession for the kings of England went through the ætheling, and King Edward and the *witanagemot* passed over the only remaining one Edgar. Instead King Edward and the *witanagemot* placed their faith in Harold Godwineson, a proven military commander and politician. King Haraldr Harðraði of Norway could claim a pact between Harðaknútr and Magnus Olafsson, but as he demonstrated in his takeover of Norway, he only needed an opportunity and his army. Duke William's great aunt was the second wife of King Æthelred, but more likely his personal bond with Edward the Confessor proved a stronger claim; up until 1066 Edward probably did consider William his heir. In the end, military accomplishments on the battlefield and not bloodline determined the king of England.

Due to his military experience in sieges, battles, and raids in Kiev, Constantinople, Denmark, and Sweden, Haraldr Harðraði was the most experienced military commander. He had made peace with Denmark after years of raiding, and finally forced the northern Norwegians to submit to him after his attacks there and his defeat of their earl Hakon Ivarsson in Sweden. He had great confidence in his ability to do well in England, especially after receiving the help of Tostig, the brother of the King of England and the former earl of Northumbria. Interpreting Tostig's raid in the summer of 1066 as part of

his and Haraldr's overall strategy to draw Harold's attention to the south and to test Earls Edwin and Morcar's military capacity makes a lot of sense. Those who interpret the raid as Tostig's action alone would be at a loss to explain why it was a good idea. Even though his father did it in 1052 and Earl Ælfgar in 1054 and 1058, they had more support than Tostig did. Tostig's knowledge of Northumbria and its leaders gave Haraldr a great advantage in attacking northern England, besides the fact that Earls Edwin and Morcar were inexperienced militarily. Haraldr easily defeated the earls in the set-piece battle at Fulford Gate. Due to Haraldr's experience in sieges and the recent devastating raids on the Cleveland coast, the inhabitants of York did well to surrender.

Harold Godwineson displayed that he had full confidence in the northern earls' ability to protect the north and that he expected the major invasion from Normandy. When Tostig left the port of Sandwich, Harold did not follow him but set himself up at the Isle of Wight and notified his levies to watch the coast. When William did not show by September 8, supplies ran out and he must have decided that the farmers had to get back to the fields and that William would not invade during this campaign season. After learning of Haraldr's invasion, Harold demonstrated his ability to strike fast when he assembled his troops (and gathered more on his way north) and marched to York within days, completely surprising Haraldr. Despite the Norse saga's reports that the battle lasted a long time, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles report of a sole Norwegian holding the English at bay for four hours on Stamford Bridge, mostly likely the English remained on their horses and pursued and slaughtered isolated Norwegians. When the English reached the main concentration of Norwegians, who formed up in a thin-lined circle to make the best defense from attacking English on horses (why would the Norwegians do

this if the English attacked dismounted like many modern historians believe?), they slaughtered the Norwegians who put up a fierce defense. Even Orri's reinforcements from Ricall arrived too late, and they were attacked next. Harold must have made a big sigh of relief that he put down the Norwegian invasion, but he soon learned of the Norman one.

Both William and Harold achieved success in an operational level. Despite stormy weather and losses incurred during travel to Saint Valéry, the Norman ships transported William's army across the Channel. He built castles to provide a secure base to ravage the countryside from and to gain additional provisions for his men and horses, which prompted Harold to protect his family's traditional earldom of Sussex. Although he could not stay in England indefinitely without bringing Harold to battle, he set up a well-defended location.

Harold's achievement in going north to fight the Norwegians and then south to battle the Normans within weeks demonstrate the flexibility of his *fyrð* system and tenacity on his own part. The military elite of his army, his mounted thegns, could travel across England, and he could support his army with local levies. Although he did not catch William off-guard, he arrived before William expected him. He had home field advantage, which would give his army a better chance to resupply and higher morale from defending its homeland from invasion. Contrary to the opinion of chroniclers and historians, Harold did not lose because he rushed into battle with William (remember William marched on Harold's location). His army had high morale from the Stamford Bridge victory and he protected the roads leading to London. The only additional thing he could have done was to use his fleet to attack William's ships on the beach.

At the tactical level, Harold and William again displayed good leadership and the decisive factor was morale. Harold set up his forces on an easily defended hill that for most of the battle minimized the effect of William's archers and cavalry, leading to a stalemate throughout most of the battle. Both leaders also saved their armies from collapse. When William's army started to flee after believing him dead, he rallied his troops, regrouped, and counter-attacked. After the death of Harold's two brothers and the collapse of his right flank that pursued the Normans and was annihilated, he regrouped his army and continued to hold his position.

Other historians may disagree with Harold's defensive posture at Hastings, but he did not have to win a complete victory and just had to contain the Normans to a limited area. The friction of war provided the incident that caused the English army to break down: the arrow through the eye that blinded Harold and ended his control over his army. Harold and his two brothers were the main army commanders, and no remaining leader could maintain the army's cohesion and discipline. With the English army in disarray, the Normans could use their archers and cavalry to penetrate and pursue them. Both Harold and William used their respective military systems to their best abilities and gambled their political careers and lives on this battle, and William came out the victor.

The evidence proves that Harold was an excellent commander with an uncanny ability to strike effectively when least expected. The fact that he personally led an army up and down England in the span of three weeks to deter two major invasions reflects his outstanding leadership ability. He faced experienced and capable opponents. Haraldr Harðraði was the veteran of countless battles, raids and sieges in Russia, around the Mediterranean Sea, Denmark, and Sweden. Duke William had consolidated power in

Normandy since the start of his reign at age nine, conducting several raids and sieges to protect his territory and consistently defeating his opponents including the French king. If not for a fateful arrow bringing him down, his descendants may have continued to rule England.

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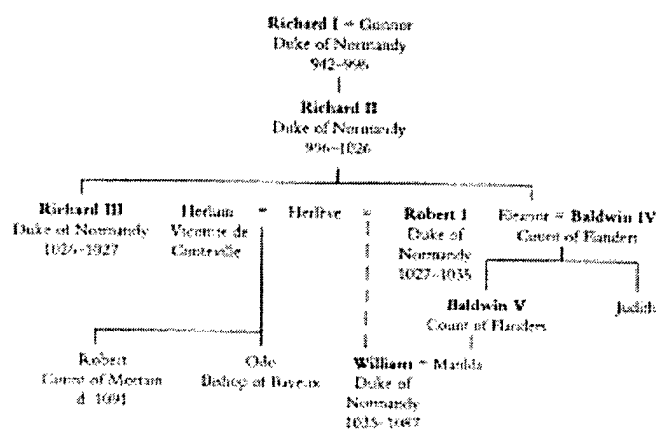
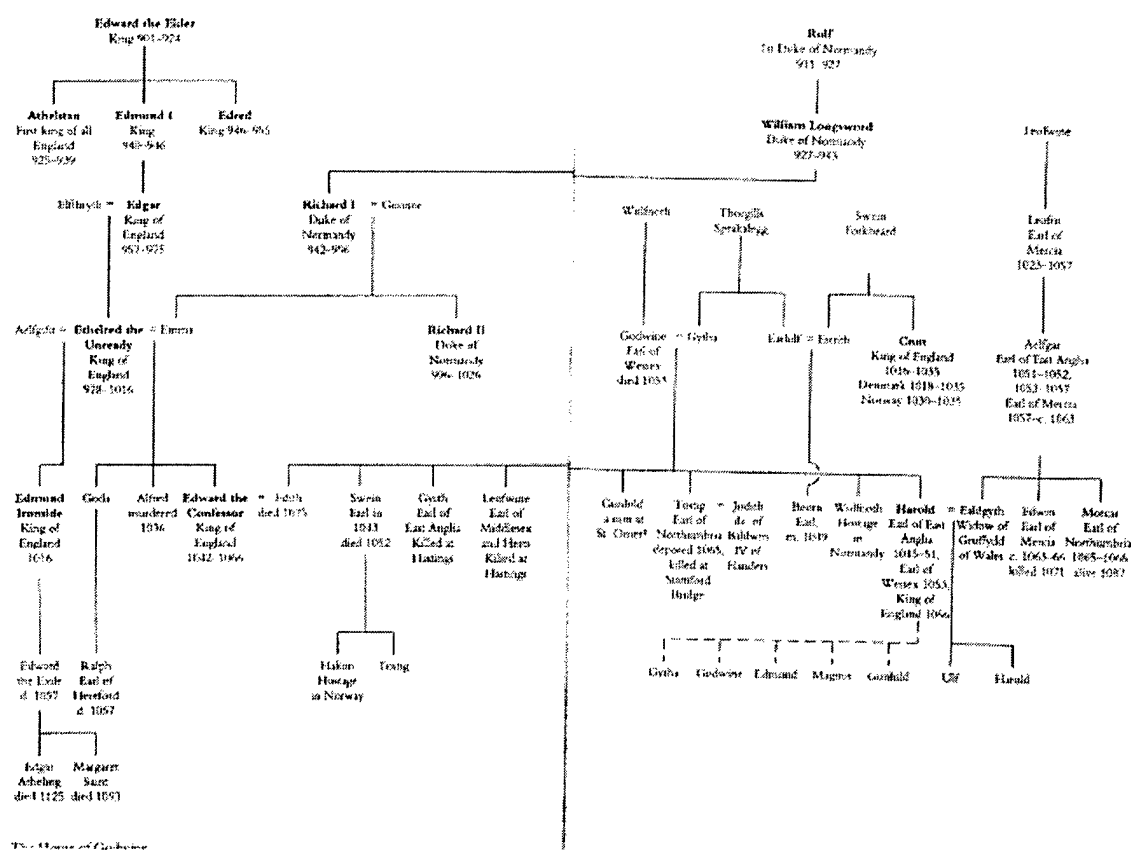


Figure 1. The Royal Families of Normandy and England. *Source.* Adapted from Peter Poyntz Wright. *Hastings. Great Battles Series* (Gloucestershire, England: The Windrush Press, 1996), 1-3.

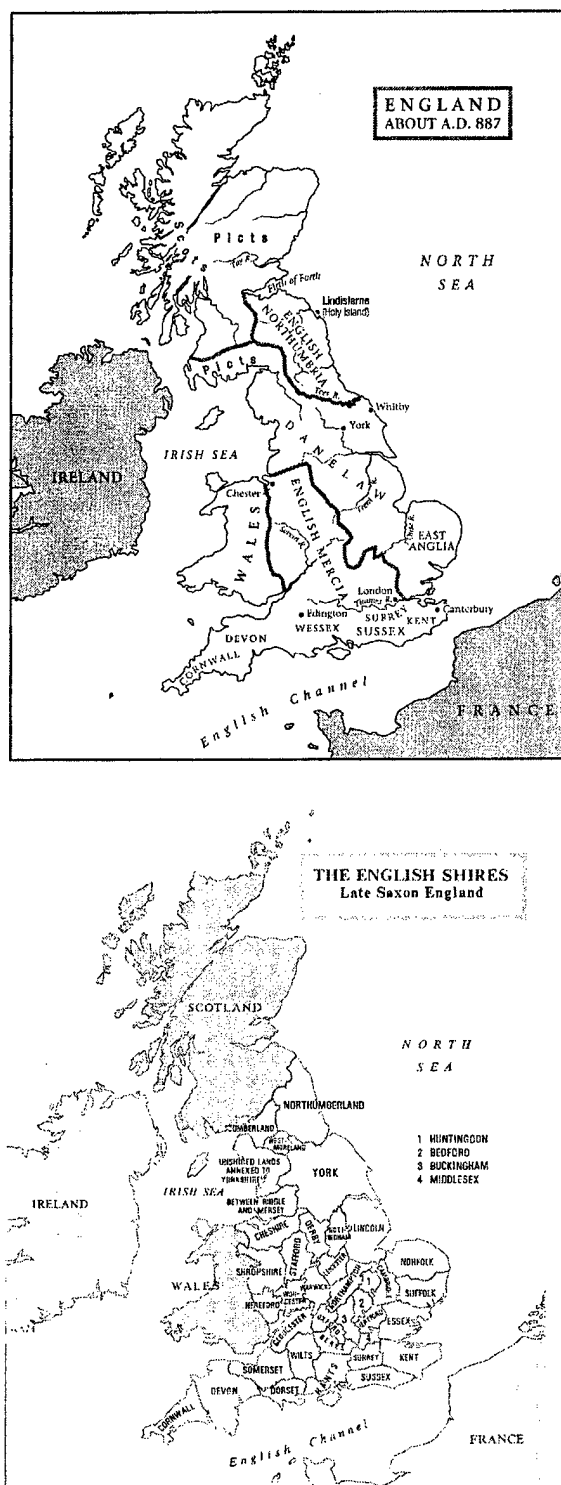


Figure 2. The Danelaw and Shires of England. *Source.* Adapted from C.W. Hollister. *The Making of England, 55 B.C. to 1399.* A History of England Series, Edited by Lacey Baldwin Smith, no. 1. Seventh Edition. (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1996), 64, 76.

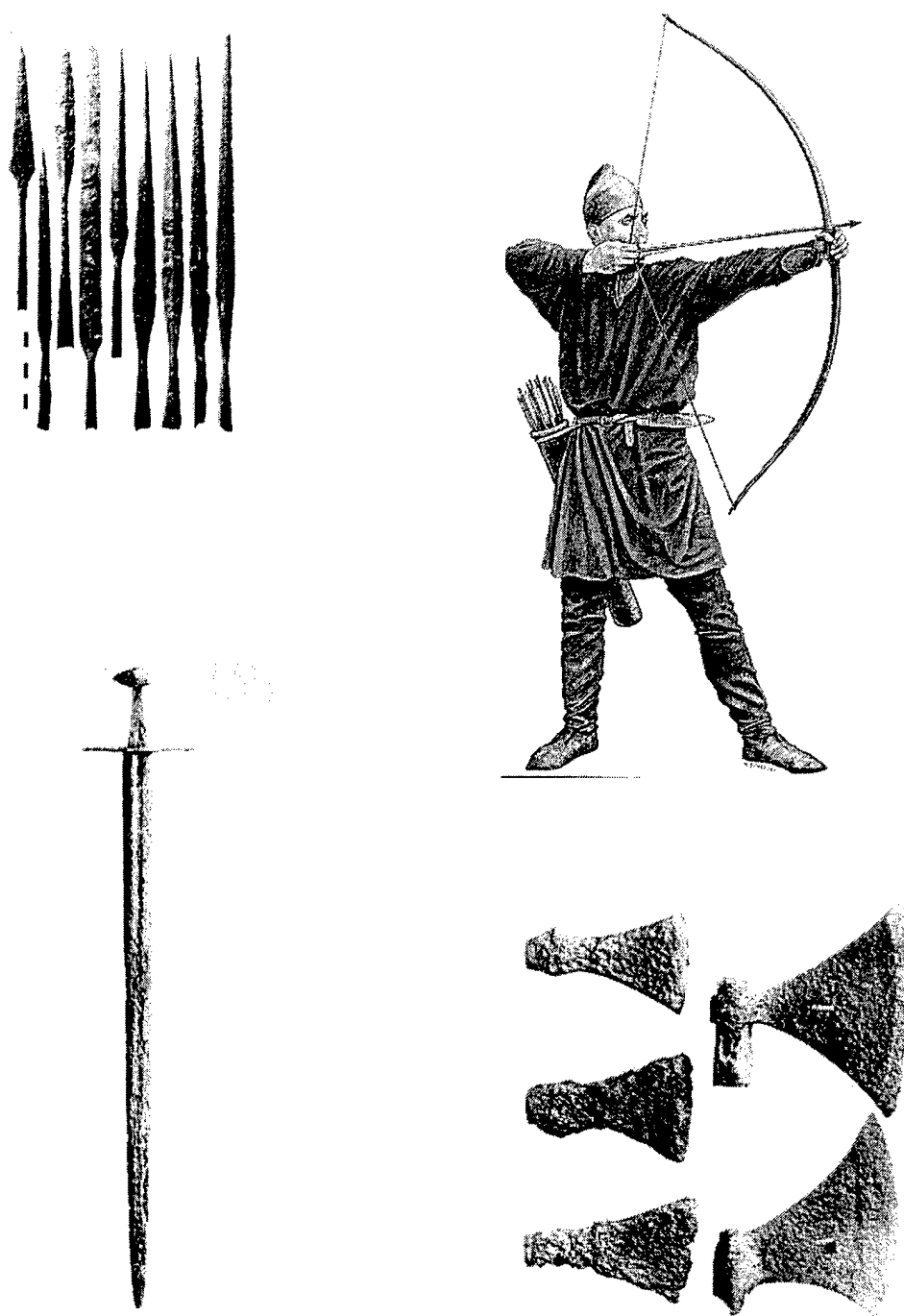


Figure 3. Spear, Sword, Axes. *Source.* Christopher Gravett. *Hastings 1066: The Fall of Saxon England.* Osprey Military Campaign Series, no. 13 (London: Osprey Publishing, 1992), 23, 32, 79.



Figure 4. Bayeux Tapestry Plates 57, 58. *Source.* Adapted from *The Bayeux Tapestry and the Norman Invasion, With an Introduction and a Translation From the Contemporary Account of William of Poitiers.* Edited by Lewis Thorpe (London: The Folio Society, 1973).

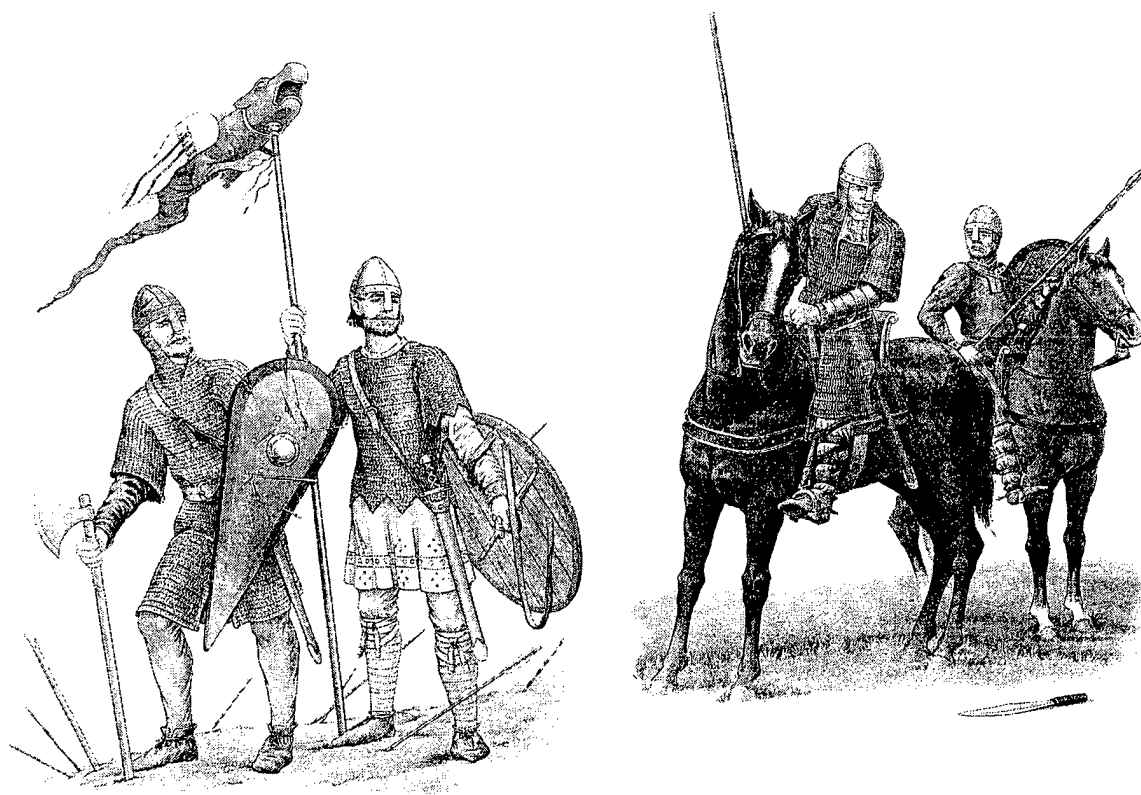


Figure 5. English Thengs and Norman Cavalry. *Source.* Adapted from Christopher Gravett. *Hastings 1066: The Fall of Saxon England.* Osprey Military Campaign Series, no. 13 (London: Osprey Publishing, 1992), 18, 66.

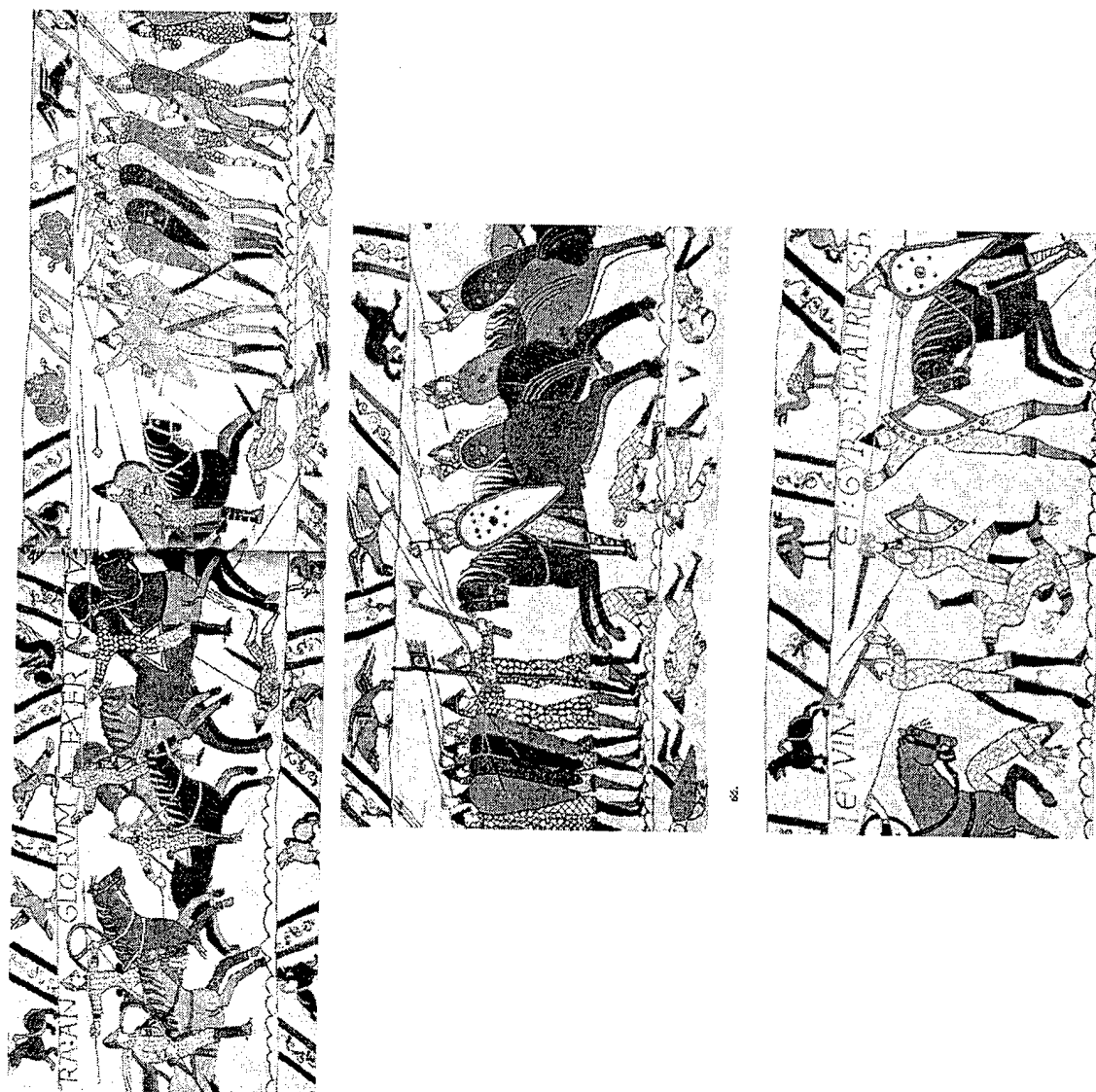


Figure 6. Bayeux Tapestry Plates 64, 65, 66, and 68. *Source.* Adapted from The Bayeux Tapestry and the Norman Invasion, With an Introduction and a Translation From the Contemporary Account of William of Poitiers. Edited by Lewis Thorpe (London: The Folio Society, 1973).



Figure 7. Bayeux Tapestry Plates 73, 74. *Source.* Adapted from *The Bayeux Tapestry and the Norman Invasion, With an Introduction and a Translation From the Contemporary Account of William of Poitiers.* Edited by Lewis Thorpe (London: The Folio Society, 1973).

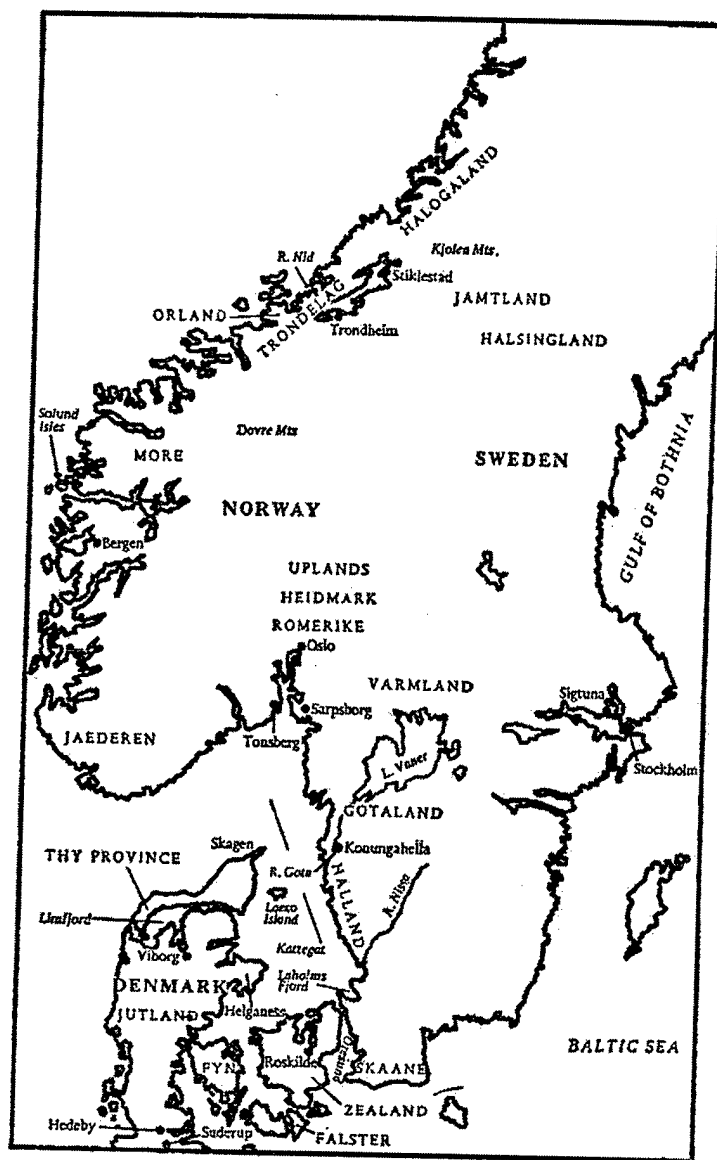


Figure 8. Norway and Its Surrounding Areas. *Source.* Adapted from Magnus Magnusson, Editor. *King Harald's Saga, Harald Hardradi of Norway, from Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla.* Translated by Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson (New York: Penguin, 1966), 186.

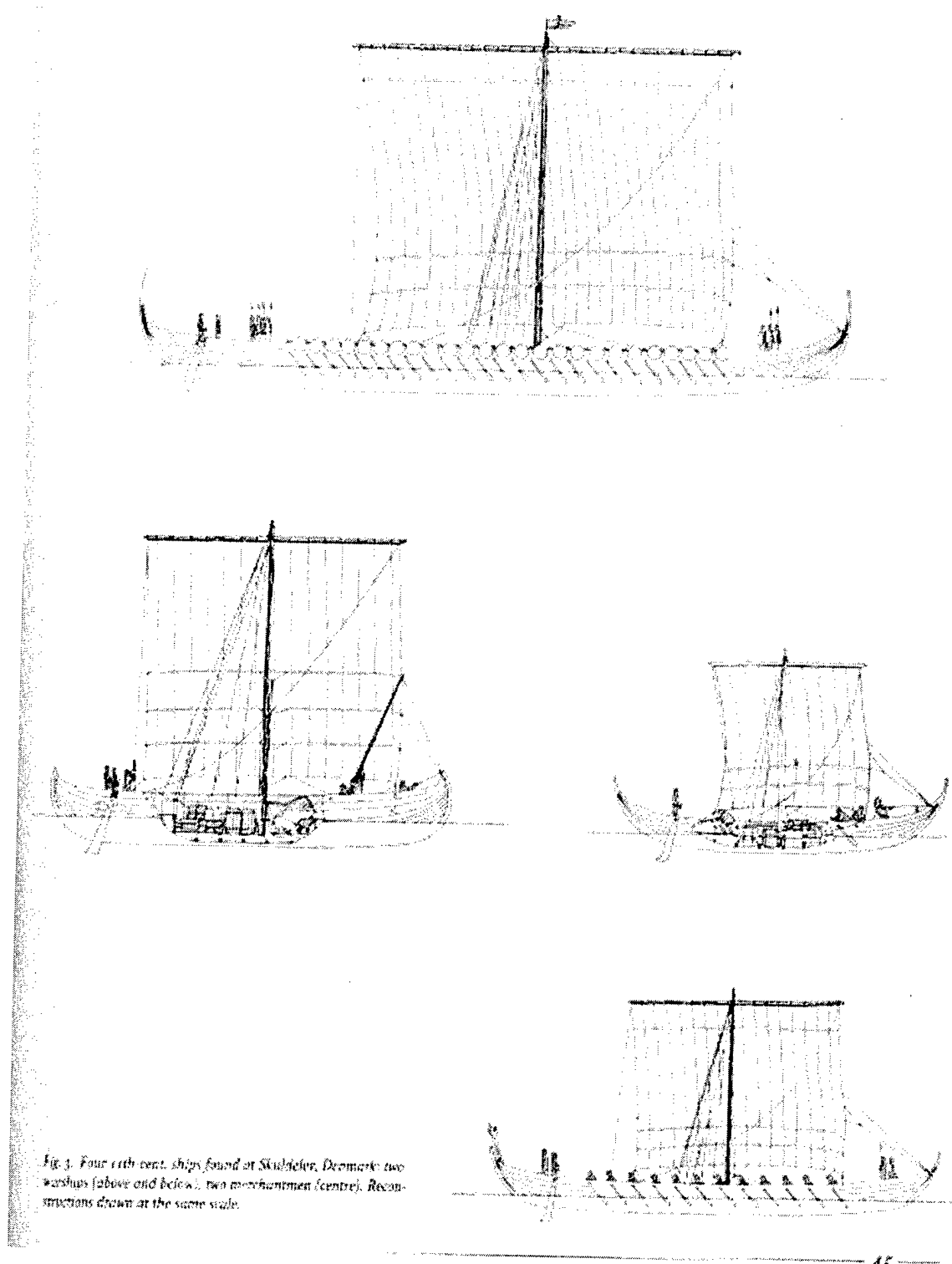


Figure 9. Viking Warships and Transports. *Source.* Adapted from Else Rosedahl and David M. Wilson, Editors. *From Vikings to Crusader, The Scandinavians and Europe, 800-1200* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1992), 45.

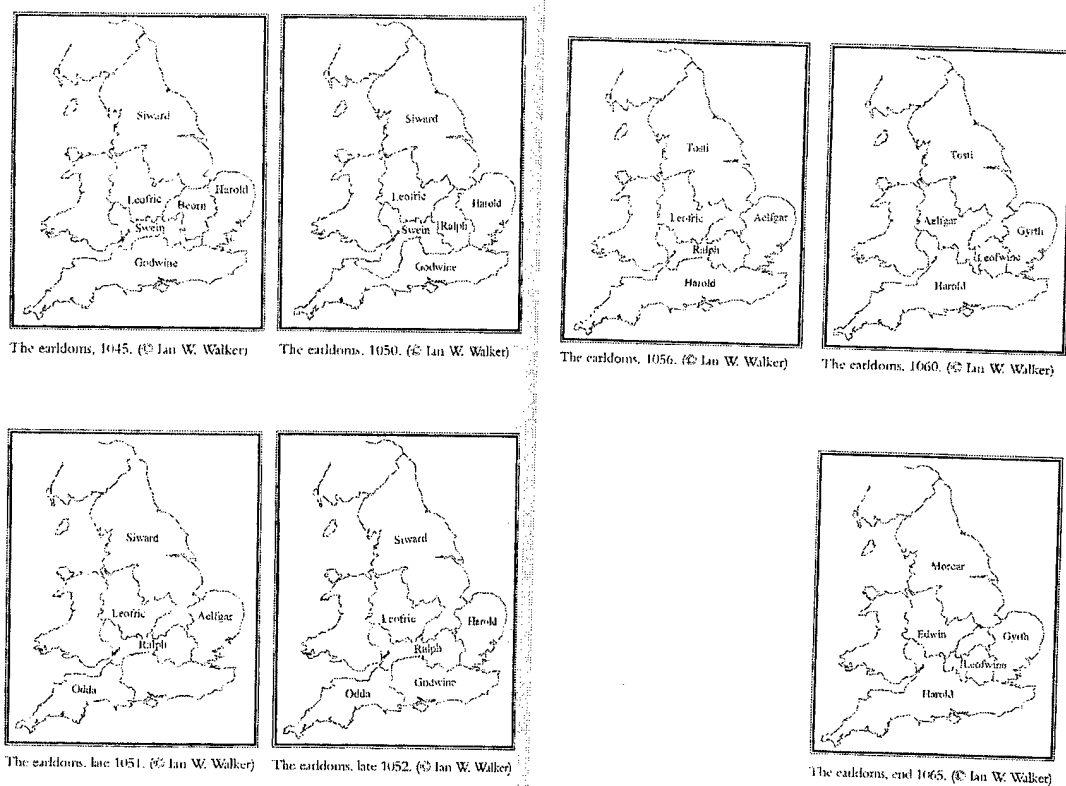


Figure 10. Earldoms from 10-1066. *Source.* Adapted from Ian W. Walker. *Harold: The Last Anglo-Saxon King* (Thrupp, England: Sutton Publishing, 1997), 210-1.

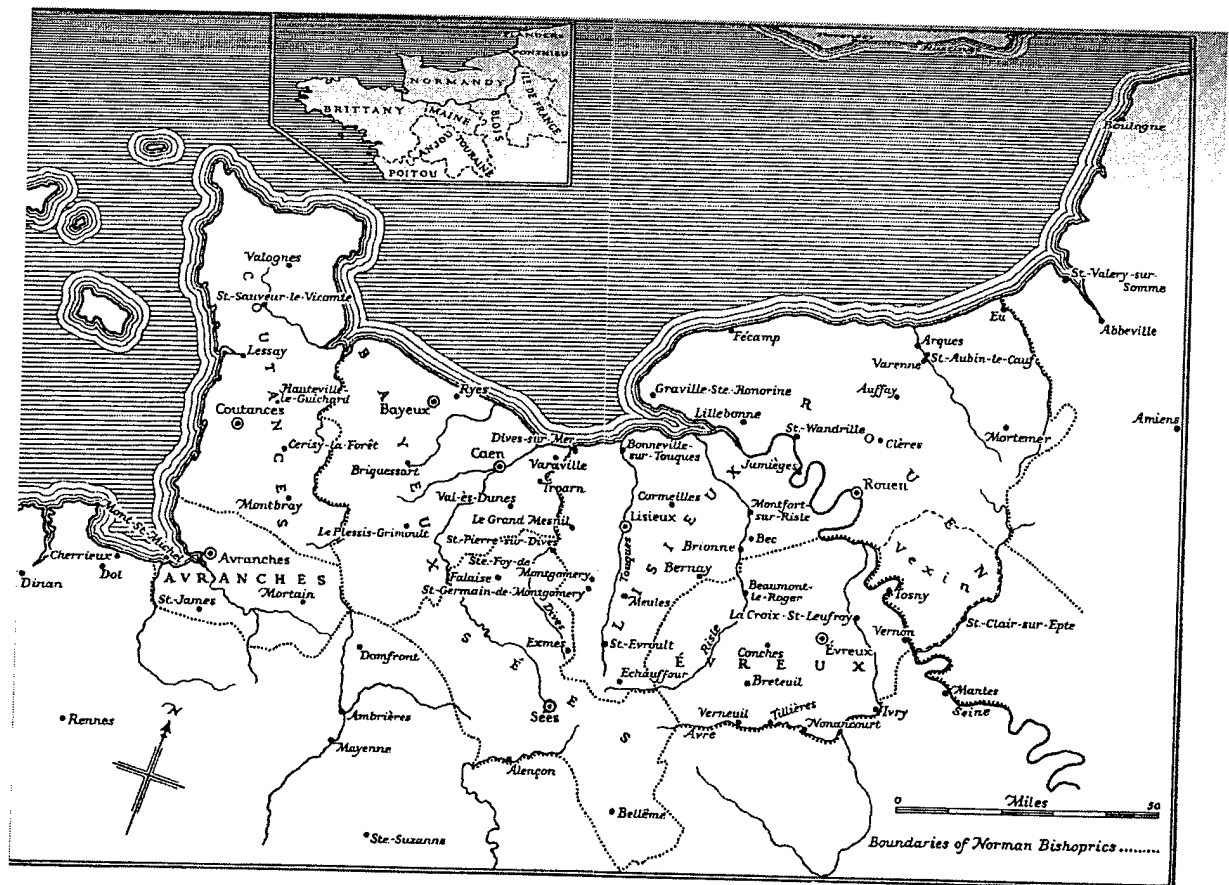


Figure 11. Normandy in the time of Duke William. Source. Adapted from R. Allen Brown. *The Normans and the Norman Conquest*. Second Edition (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 1985), xi.



Figure 12. Bayeux Tapestry Plates 27. *Source.* Adapted from *The Bayeux Tapestry and the Norman Invasion, With an Introduction and a Translation From the Contemporary Account of William of Poitiers.* Edited by Lewis Thorpe (London: The Folio Society, 1973).

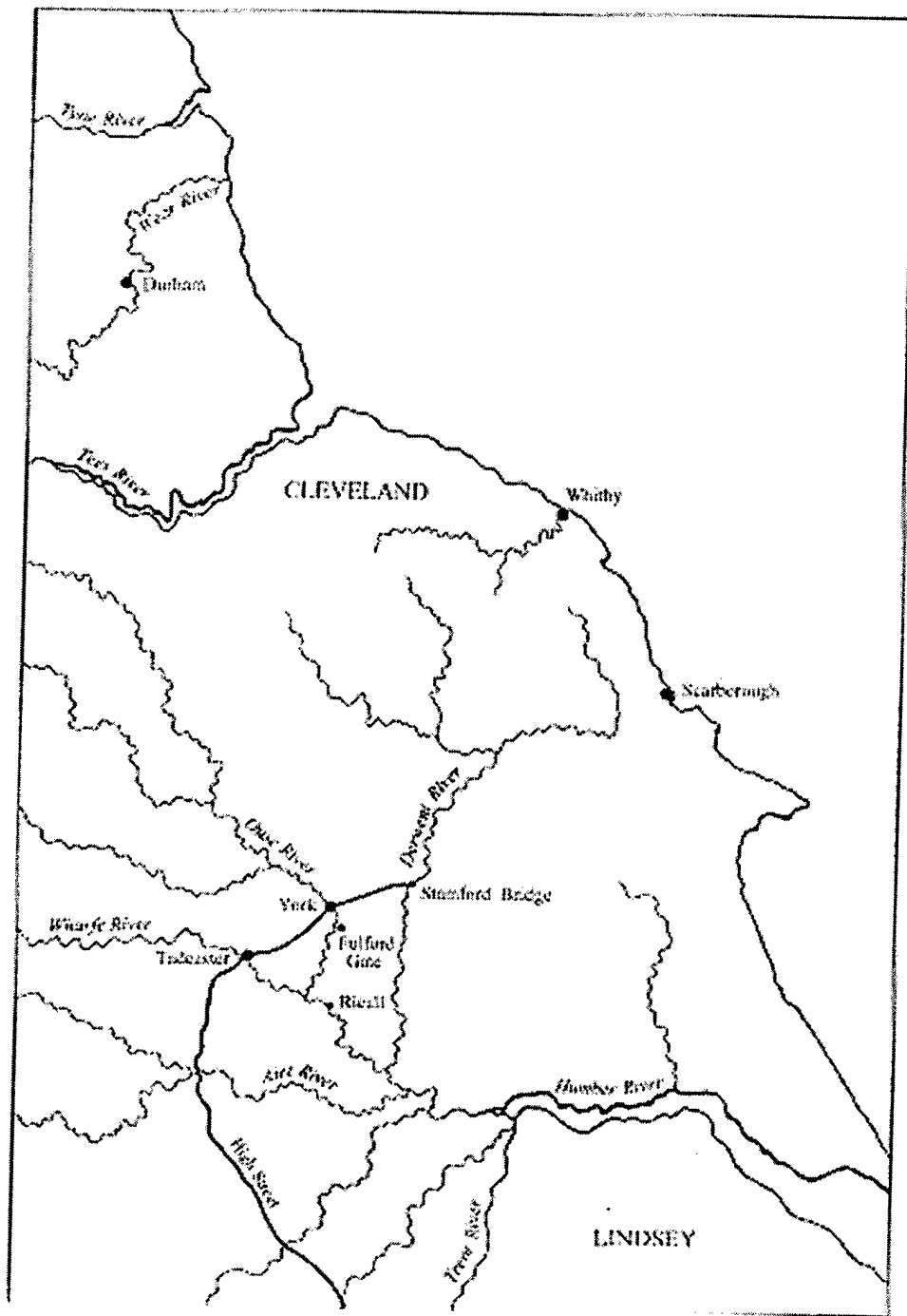


Figure 14. The Cleveland Coast in Northern England During Harald's Invasion. *Source.* Adapted from Kelly DeVries. *The Norwegian Invasion of England in 1066.* Warfare in History Series. Edited by Matthew Bennett, no. 8. (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1999), 246.

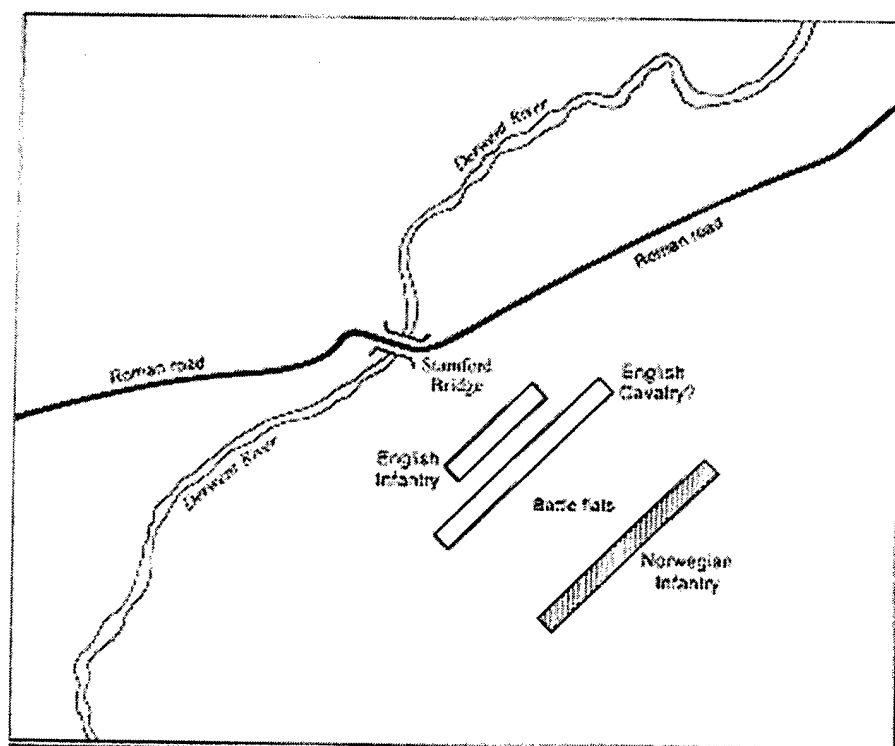
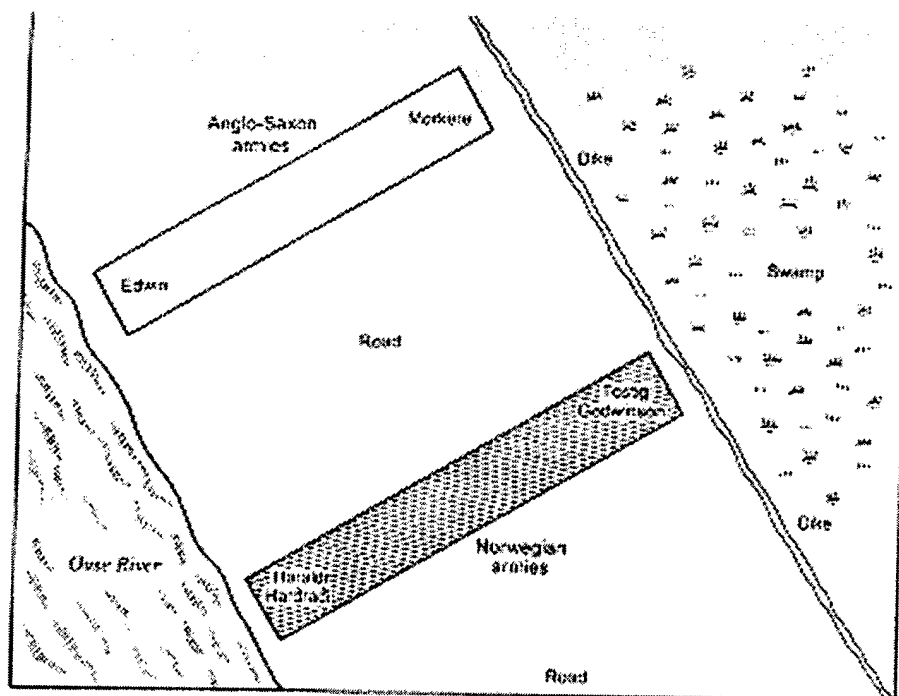


Figure 15. Battles of Fulford Gate and Stamford Bridge. *Source.* Adapted from Kelly DeVries. *The Norwegian Invasion of England in 1066.* Warfare in History Series. Edited by Matthew Bennett, no. 8. (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1999), 257, 277.

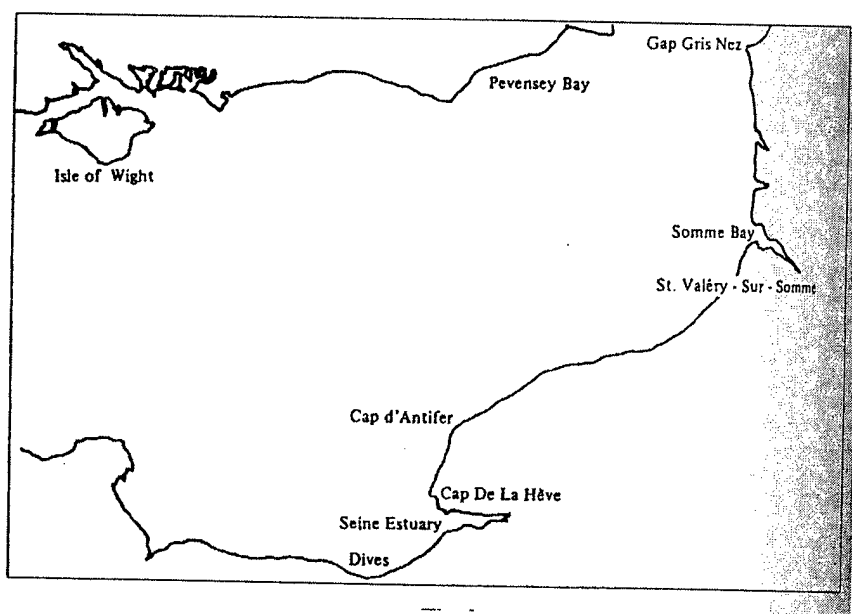


Figure 16. The English Channel During William's Crossing. *Source.* Adapted from Christine Grainge and Gerald Grainge. "The Pevensey Expedition: Brilliantly Executed Plan or Near Disaster?" In *The Battle of Hastings: Sources and Interpretations*. Edited by Stephen Morillo, 129-142. Warfare in History Series, ed. Matthew Bennett, no. 1. (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1998), 132.

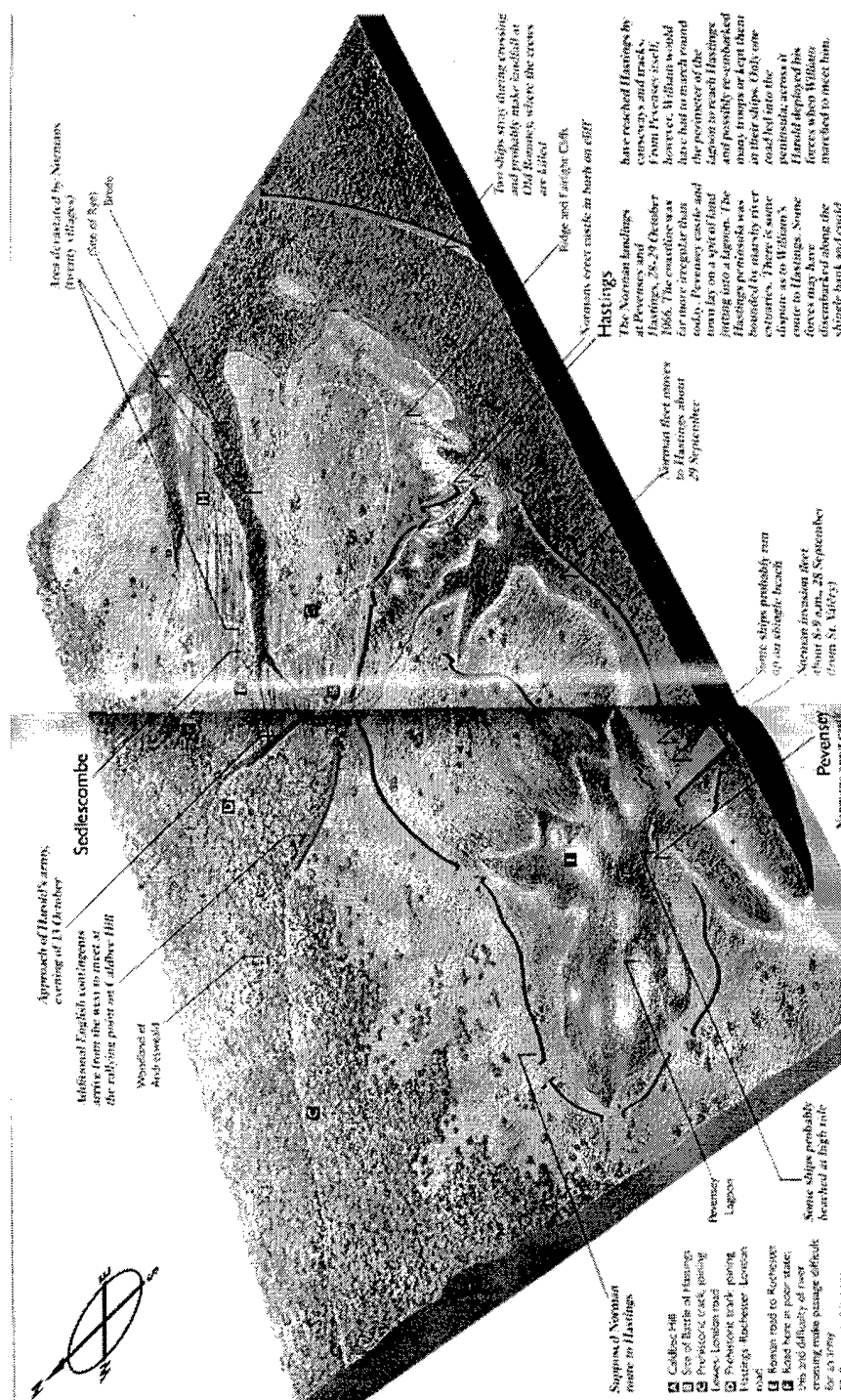


Figure 17. The Hastings Peninsula. *Source.* Christopher Gravett. *Hastings 1066: The Fall of Saxon England.* Osprey Military Campaign Series, ed. David G. Chandler, no. 13. (London: Osprey Publishing, 1992), 50-1.



Figure 18. Bayeux Tapestry Plates 49, 50, 51, 52, 53. *Source.* Adapted from *The Bayeux Tapestry and the Norman Invasion, With an Introduction and a Translation From the Contemporary Account of William of Poitiers*. Edited by Lewis Thorpe (London: The Folio Society, 1973).

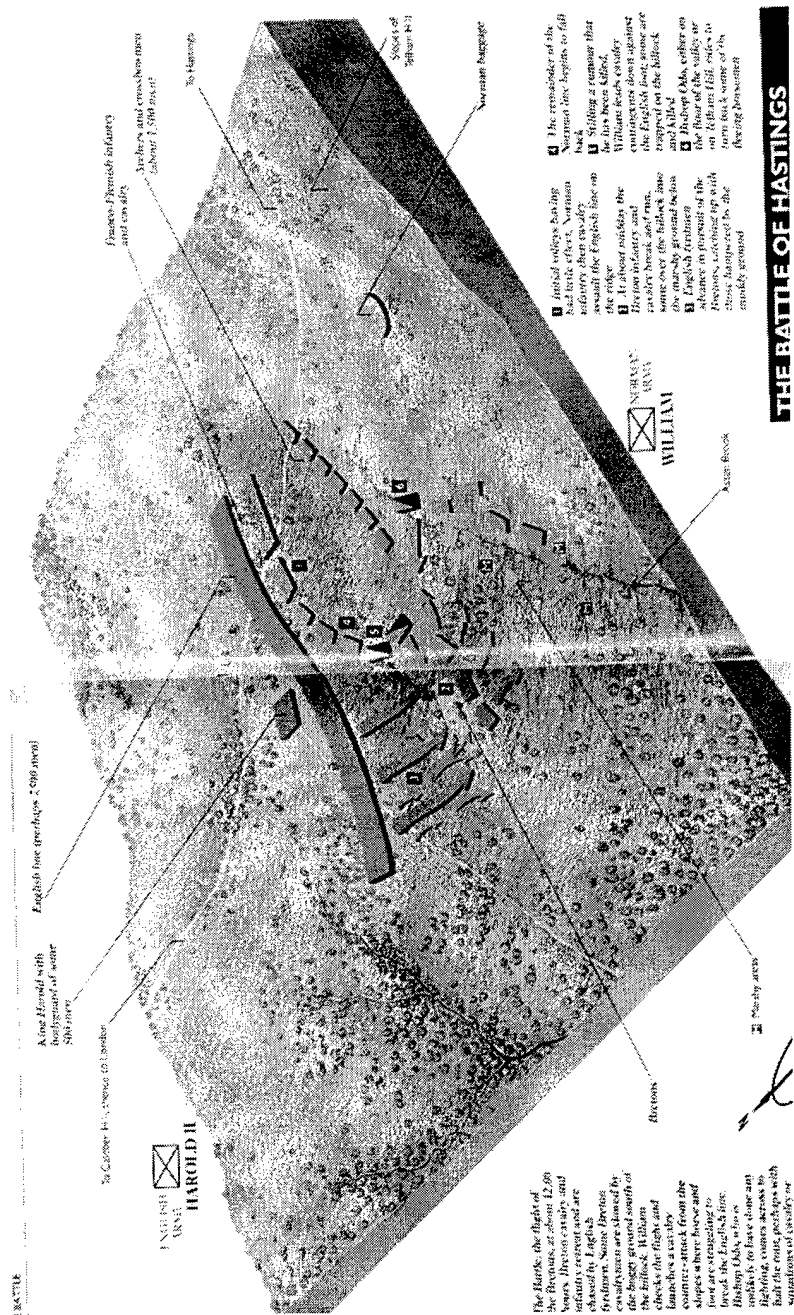
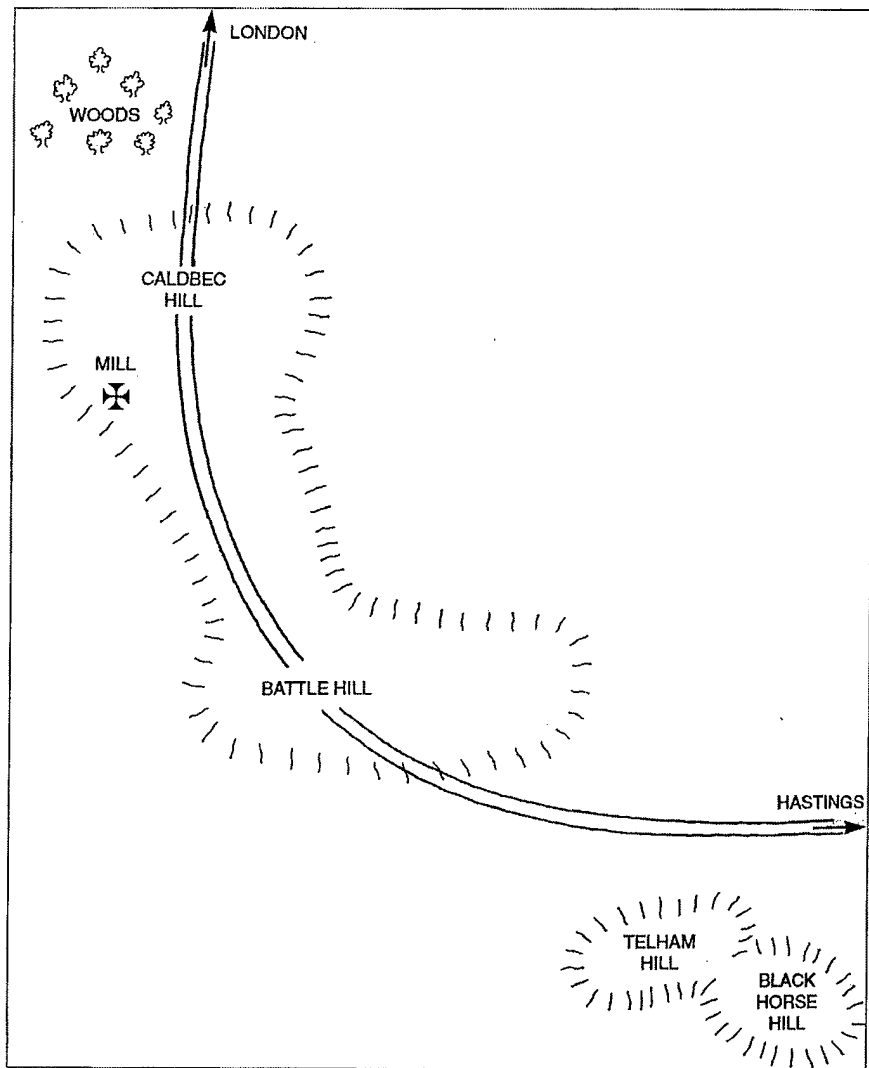
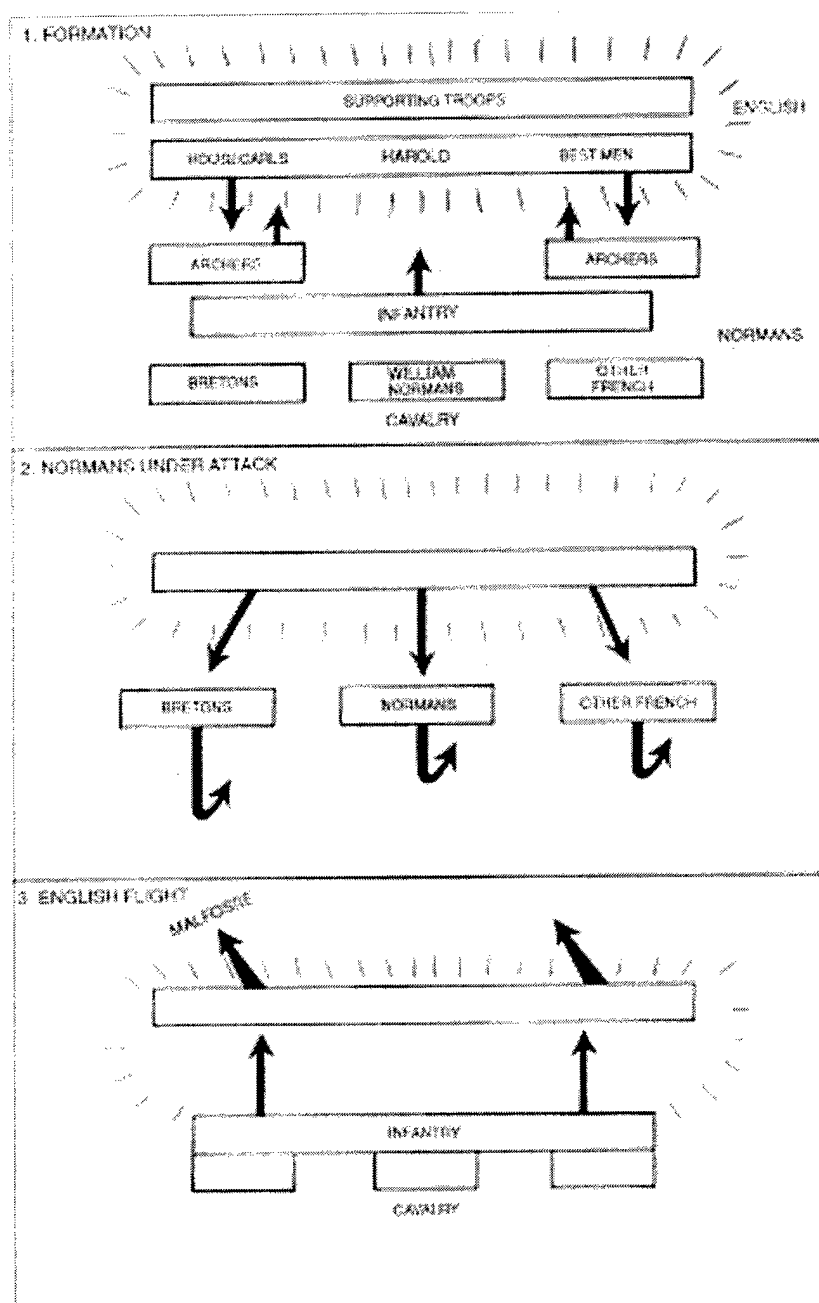


Figure 19. Battle of Hastings. Source. Adapted from Christopher Gravett. *Hastings 1066: The Fall of Saxon England*. Osprey Military Campaign Series, no. 13 (London: Osprey Publishing, 1992), 70-71.



The area in which the battle was fought: Caldbec and Battle Hill. (Map: Mike Komarnycki)

Figure 20. Bradbury's Location for the Battle of Hastings: Caldbec Hill. *Source.* Adapted from Jim Bradbury. *The Battle of Hastings* (Phoenix Mill, England: Sutton Publishing, 1998), 182.



The three stages of the battle of Hastings: 1. the confrontation; 2. the English counter-attack; 3. the Norman breakthrough. (Map: Mike Komarnycky)

Figure 21. Bayeux Tapestry Plates 49, 50, 51, 52, 53. *Source.* Adapted from Jim Bradbury. *The Battle of Hastings* (Phoenix Mill, England: Sutton Publishing, 1998), 184.



Figure 22. Bayeux Tapestry Plates 77, 78, 79, 80. *Source.* Adapted from The Bayeux Tapestry and the Norman Invasion, With an Introduction and a Translation From the Contemporary Account of William of Poitiers. Edited by Lewis Thorpe (London: The Folio Society, 1973).